

**PHILOSOPHY 211  
CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

PHIL 211: Contemporary Moral Issues (3 credit hours)

**Course Description:**

Moral issues confronting men and women in contemporary society. Topics will vary but may include discussion of problems related to abortion, drugs, euthanasia, war, social engineering, and punishment of criminals.

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

Part of moral philosophy involves searching for answers to questions such as ‘What values or norms should guide human action?’ ‘What is the role of values and norms for individual and social well-being?’ and ‘How do we decide what is right or good?’ In this course we examine different answers to these questions by looking at four contentious issues in American society.

**ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Upon successful completion of Philosophy 211, students will be able to:**

1. Identify the source and function of values through the investigation of contemporary moral issues
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of values and ethics for the self and for contemporary society
3. Reflect on how values shape personal and community ethics, and decision-making.

**SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

1. *Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide* (EPAS)
2. *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro & Con A Reader* (SSM)
3. *Food For Thought* (FFT)
4. *Eating Animals* (EA)
5. *Course Pack* (CP), containing the following readings:
  - a. Housmam, D.M. and McPherson, M.S. ‘What are Moral Questions and How Can They Be Answered?’
  - b. Institute of Medicine. Care Without Coverage Too Little, Too Late, summary.
  - c. [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov) About the Law and Moving Forward to Implement the Health Insurance Exchanges
  - d. Folbre, N. 2011. ‘Vermont’s Move Toward Single-Payer Health Insurance. NY Times, June 6, 2011.
  - e. Sack, K. 2009. ‘Massachusetts’s faces Costs of Big Health Care Plan’. NY Times, March 15, 2009.
  - f. Williams, B. ‘The idea of equality’

- g. Nozick, R. Anarchy.. 'Equality, Envy, Exploitation, Etc..
- h. Peikoff, L. 'Health Care is Not a Right'
- i. Daniels, N. 'Health-Care Needs and Distributive Justice'
- j. Dworkin, R. Justice and the High Cost of Health Care
- k. Buchanan, A.E. 'The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care'
- l. Sreenivasan, G. 'Health Care and Equality of Opportunity'
- m. Marmot, M. 'Inequalities in Health'
- n. Institute of Medicine. Unequal Treatment: What Healthcare Providers Need to Know About Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare, summary.
- o. Kass, L.R. 'Neither for Love nor Money: Why Doctors Must Not Kill'
- p. Quill, T.E. Death and Dignity A Case of Individualized Decision Making
- q. Oregon Public Health Division. FAQs About the Death With Dignity Act.  
<http://public.health.oregon.gov/PROVIDERPARTNERRESOURCES/EVALUATIONRESEARCH/DEATHWITHDIGNITYACT/Pages/faqs.aspx>
- r. Paul Martin's speech on same-sex marriage.  
[http://www.yawningbread.org/apdx\\_2005/imp-176.htm](http://www.yawningbread.org/apdx_2005/imp-176.htm)
- s. Confessore, N. and Barbaro, M. 2011. 'New York Allows Same-Sex Marriage, Becoming Largest State to Pass Law. NY Times, June 24, 2011.
- t. Pollan, M. The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals

### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS**

1. **Letter to the Editor:** In this assignment students will be given a magazine article and asked to write a letter to the Editor in approximately 1000-1200 words (3-4 pages double spaced 12 point Times Roman font). The letter may be praiseworthy, condemnatory or something in-between. The purpose of this assignment is to 1) give students the opportunity to identify the implications of holding certain values, norms and principles, and 2) have them to explore the relative importance of these values, norms and principles for themselves and society at large.
2. **Mid-Term Exam:** The exam will consist of short-answer questions and mini essay questions. The purpose of the exam is three-fold, 1) to determine whether students can identify the values, norms and principles associated with the different positions exemplified in the reading assignments and class lectures, 2) to ascertain students' ability to articulate the reasons why these values, norms and principles are held and 3) to evaluate students' ability to understand the implications of holding these values, norms and principles.
3. **Homework:** Over the course of the semester students will have 11 homework assignments. The purpose of these assignments is to give students an immediate opportunity to reflect on the class readings. These assignments will vary, but examples include asking students to identify two reasons an author provides for a conclusion, asking them to imagine that a loved one has a terminal illness and discussing how they would feel about that person's request for physician-assisted suicide and the values that

it implies, and asking students to assess in approximately 300 words whether or not same-sex marriage is subject to 'slippery slope' objections.

4. **Debates:** Debates will take place during discussion sections. Students will participate in two debates throughout the semester. These debates will require students to identify the values, norms and/or principles that undergird different moral positions, articulate the reasons given for different moral positions and discuss the implications of these moral positions. In addition students will evaluate the relative merits of these positions arguing that one position is better or more important or more justified than another.
5. **Final Essay:** In this assignment students will be given a choice of two questions and asked to respond to one of them with an essay of approximately 1600 words (5 pages double spaced, 12 point Times Roman font). This essay will provide students with an ethical dilemma, which they must work through using decision frameworks and examples from the assigned readings. Examples of ethical dilemmas include: Imagine you are a doctor and one of your patients asks for euthanasia. You are sympathetic to her request, but worried about the social and legal implications of complying. How should you respond? Or consider a second example: Imagine you are a vegetarian because you think it is morally wrong to eat animals. Your mother/father/partner/roommate is an avid carnivore. How do you handle meal times? Grocery shopping? Should you share pots and pans?

## **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

**Class 1**      **Introduction to Phil 211**

**Class 2**      **Answering Moral Questions and Evaluating Moral Arguments**

Preparation for questions regarding the identification of values, norms and principles and the evaluation of reasons in favor of certain moral positions

Course pack (CP): What are Moral Questions and How Can They Be Answered?

DISCUSSION SECTION: Introduction to debating contemporary moral issues

Homework (1)

**Class 3**      **Access to Healthcare: Current Status**

Preparation for questions regarding how values, norms and principles 1) inform the way lives are lived in terms of healthcare and 2) inform decision-making and policies around healthcare.

CP: Care without Coverage Too Little Too Late; About the Law and Moving Forward to Implement the Health Insurance Exchanges; Vermont's Move Toward Single-Payer Health Insurance; Massachusetts's faces Costs of Big Health Care Plan'

**Class 4**      **Access to Healthcare: Equality**

Identification of one value that undergirds universal access to healthcare;  
Provides reasons why we ought to hold this value  
CP: The idea of equality  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (2)

**Class 5**      **Access to Healthcare: Equality**  
Identification of one value that undergirds universal access to healthcare;  
Provides reasons why we ought not hold this value  
CP: Equality, Envy, Exploitation, etc.

**Class 6**      **Access to Healthcare: Equality of Opportunity**  
Provides a framework for deciding what types of healthcare we (as a society)  
ought to pay for  
CP: Health-Care Needs and Distributive Justice  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate

**Class 7**      **Access to Healthcare: Prudential Insurance**  
Provides a framework for deciding what types of healthcare we (as a society)  
ought to pay for  
CP: Justice and the High Cost of Health Care

**Class 8**      **Access to Healthcare: Healthcare as a right**  
Identification of one value that undergirds universal access to healthcare; one  
article provides reasons why we ought to hold this value and the other provides  
reasons why we ought not hold it  
CP: The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care; Health Care is Not a Right  
  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (3)

**Class 9**      **Access to Healthcare: Social Determinants of Health**  
Identification of one value that undergirds universal access to healthcare;  
Provides implications of holding this view  
CP: Health Care and Equality of Opportunity; Inequalities in Health; Unequal  
Treatment: What Healthcare Providers Need to Know About Racial and Ethnic  
Disparities in Healthcare

**Class 10**      **Euthanasia/Physician-Assisted Suicide (PAS): The Nature of Medicine**  
Identifies multiple values, norms and principles that undergird euthanasia and  
PAS; One article provides reasons for why we ought to hold these values and one  
provides reasons why we ought not to hold them  
CP: Neither for Love nor Money; Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide  
(EPAS): 3-16

DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (4)  
'Letter to the Editor' Due

**Class 11**      **Euthanasia/PAS: Voluntary Active Euthanasia (VAE) vs. PAS**  
Provides reasons why we ought to hold values that undergird PAS and VAE;  
Provides example of ethical dilemma and professional decision-making  
CP: Death and Dignity A Case of Individualized Decision Making; EPAS: 17-42

**Class 12**      **Euthanasia/PAS: Choosing Death, Taking Life**  
  
Identifies values that undergird suicide; Discusses the importance of different values for living a good life, i.e. individual and social well-being  
EPAS: 83-106  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (5)

**Class 13**      **Euthanasia/PAS: Slippery Slope**  
Evaluations policies in favor of euthanasia and PAS in terms of social well-being  
EPAS: 43-63

**Class 14**      **Euthanasia/PAS: Euthanasia**  
Provides reasons why we ought not hold the values that undergird euthanasia  
EPAS: 107-127  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (6)

**Class 15**      **Euthanasia/PAS: Public Policy**  
Identifies the values that ought to inform public policy regarding euthanasia and PAS; Provides an example of public policy and the framework used to inform the decision-making around when someone is or is not eligible for PAS  
CP: FAQ About the Death With Dignity Act; EPAS: 64-80

**Class 16**      **Euthanasia/PAS: Physician Assisted Suicide**  
Provides reasons why we ought not hold the values that undergird PAS  
EPAS: 128-139  
DISCUSSION SECTION  
Homework (7)  
**Mid-Term Exam**

**Class 17**      **Same-Sex Marriage: Current Status**

Preparation for questions regarding how values, norms and principles 1) inform the way lives are lived in terms of being allowed/not allowed to legally marry and 2) inform decision-making and policies around who can be married  
CP: Paul Martin's Speech on Same Sex Marriage; New York Allows Same-Sex Marriage, Becoming Largest State to Pass Law; Same-Sex Marriage (SSM): 204-38

- Class 18**      **Same-Sex Marriage: Religious Views**  
Identifies various religious values that undergird different positions on same-sex marriage  
SSM: 46-85  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate
- Class 19**      **Same-Sex Marriage: Parenthood**  
Discusses the implications of same-sex marriage on children and parenthood; identifies different values that undergird same-sex marriage which lead to the flourishing or failure to raise well-adjusted children (chapter provides both views) SSM: 239-72
- Class 20**      **Same-Sex Marriage: Slippery Slope**  
Evaluates policies in favor of same-sex marriage in terms of social well-being  
SSM: 273-94  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (8)
- Class 21**      **Same-Sex Marriage: The Left**  
Identifies values on the political left in favor and against same-sex marriage; Provides competing reasons why we ought to hold these different values  
SSM: 121-45
- Class 22**      **Same-Sex Marriage: The Right**  
Identifies values on the political right in favor and against same-sex marriage; Provides competing reasons why we ought to hold these different values  
SSM: 146-203  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (9)
- Class 23**      **Eating Animals: Arguments for Vegetarianism**  
Identifies values in favor of vegetarianism; Provides reasons why we ought to hold these values  
Foer's Eating Animals provides one man's account of the importance of eating and not eating meat for his own well-being and that of society at large.  
Eating Animals (EA): 3-41  
Food For Thought (FFT): 108-117

- Class 24**      **Eating Animals: Conscientious Carnivore**  
Identifies values in favor of eating animals; Provides reasons why we ought to hold these values  
EA: 81-121  
FFT: 81-91  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (10)
- Class 25**      **Eating Animals: Some Religious Views**  
Identifies some religious values that undergird different positions on eating/not eating animals  
EA: 151-73  
FFT: 168-76, 177-85
- Class 26**      **Eating Animals: Valuing Predation**  
Identifies one value that undergirds eating animals; Provides reasons why we ought to hold this value  
EA: 174-199  
FFT: 294-301  
DISCUSSION SECTION: Debate  
Homework (11)
- Class 27**      **Eating Animals: Animal Rights**  
Identifies one value that undergirds eating animals; Provides reasons why we ought not hold this value  
EA: 204-44  
FFT: 152-66
- Class 28**      **Eating Animals: Thanksgiving and Other Meals**  
Relates this unit's discussion of eating animals to what we eat for Thanksgiving and in everyday life, i.e. shows how the values we hold inform the way we live our lives  
EA: 247-67  
CP: Excerpt from Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals  
DISCUSSION SECTION  
Review/Assistance with Final Paper

**Final Exam and Final Essay due according to university exam schedule**