Contemporary Moral Problems (4/5 units)
Philosophy 72, Ethics in Society 185M, Political Science 134P
Winter 2016
Tuesday/Thursday 10:30AM-11:50AM in building 60, room 120

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Course Description
This course considers some of the moral problems encountered on campus and elsewhere in our lives as citizens and individuals. We will begin with questions that pertain to our own classroom and gradually broaden our scope to include, eventually, questions about terrorism and torture. The primary aims of the course are to encourage students to recognize and address moral questions as they appear in the concrete messiness of life and to help students develop the skills necessary to do this. Questions to be considered include: What would make this a good class and is this very question a moral one? What is education and who is entitled to it? What is the value of equality on campus and beyond? What is institutional discrimination? Are Stanford athletes being exploited? What should count as sexual harassment and is it properly captured by Stanford sexual harassment policies? Should abortions be offered by the Stanford Division of Family Planning? Is it permissible to kill animals for the purpose of scientific experimentation? Should Stanford divest from coal companies? Ought the City of San Francisco allow the homeless to reside in its streets? Who has the standing to condemn acts of terror and how do such acts compare to torture?

Course Goals
The goal of this course is not merely to read philosophy, but to do philosophy. Toward that end, in each class meeting we will critically evaluate the arguments made in the readings, identify the tools philosophers use to make those arguments, and, ideally, use these tools to make and assess our own arguments. By the end of the quarter, students should be able to:

i. Reconstruct and evaluate arguments for controversial moral conclusions.
ii. Articulate shared presuppositions of conflicting views about one and the same moral problem.
iii. Distinguish and move back and forth between academic and literary modes of philosophizing.
iv. Tell the difference between an illuminating disagreement and a merely competitive one.
v. Communicate nuanced answers to the questions that drive this course.
Assignments and Grading

Paper #1 (≈5 pages): Due January 25th (20% of course grade)  
Paper #2 (≈5 pages): Due February 15th (30% of course grade)  
Paper #3 (≈10-12 pages): Due March 14th (40% of course grade)  
Informed, Respectful, and Productive Participation* (10% of course grade)

*Participation will be evaluated on the following guidelines, which stress the quality rather than the quantity of contributions.

A range (A+, A, A-): The student is highly motivated and engaged. S/he has clearly thought about the material in advance of class—including the questions on the syllabus—and has substantive and thoughtful questions and ideas. S/he listens and responds respectfully to other students’ contributions.

B range (B+, B, B-): The student participates consistently and comes to class prepared. S/he listens and responds respectfully to other students’ contributions.

C range (C+, C, C-): The student is prepared for class and participates on occasion, but her/his contributions do not advance the discussion. S/he is respectful to other students.

Students who fail to meet this minimal set of criteria will receive a “D” or lower.

Attendance in lectures is mandatory. Failure to attend lectures will lead to a lower participation grade.

Topics and Readings

Week 1: Education and Classroom Ethics

Tuesday, January 5. What would make this a good class and is this very question a moral one?

• No readings.

Thursday, January 7. How should this class be conducted?

• Jencks, Christopher. “Whom Must We Treat Equally for Educational Opportunity to be Equal?” Ethics 98, 1988, pp. 518-533.

Week 2: Equality in Education and Beyond

Tuesday, January 12. Who is admitted to Stanford?

• Adam Swift, How Not to be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed Parent, 2003, chapter 2, pp. 21 – 33.
• Stanford Admissions Report, March 2015.  

**Thursday, January 14.** Equality beyond education


**Week 3: Discrimination**

**Tuesday, January 19.** Institutional discrimination

• Stanford University Nondiscrimination Policy  
  https://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/registrar/policies/nondiscrimination

**Thursday, January 21.** Resistance and disobedience to unjust institutions


**Week 4: Exploitation**

*First paper due by 12PM Monday, Jan. 25.*

**Tuesday, January 26.** Exploitation of college athletes

• Alan Wertheimer, “The Exploitation of Student Athletes,” in his *Exploitation*, pp. 3 - 4, 10 - 12, 77 - 95,
• Oliver, John. “The NCAA.” *Last Week Tonight*.  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pX8BXH3SJn0

**Thursday, January 28.** Exploitation and justice


**Week 5: Sexual Harassment**

**Tuesday, February 2.** What counts as sexual harassment?

- Overview of Stanford Policies on Sexual Harassment. [https://harass.stanford.edu/be-informed/overview-stanford-policies](https://harass.stanford.edu/be-informed/overview-stanford-policies)

**Thursday, February 4.** What is sexual harassment?


**Week 6: Abortion**

**Tuesday, February 9.** Abortion and regret

- Amelia Bonow, “My abortion made me happy,” *Salon*. Available online: [http://www.salon.com/2015/09/22/my_abortion_made_me_happy_the_story_that_started_the_shoutyourabortion_movement/](http://www.salon.com/2015/09/22/my_abortion_made_me_happy_the_story_that_started_the_shoutyourabortion_movement/)

**Thursday, February 11.** Abortion and wrongness


**Week 7: Animals**

*Second paper due by 12PM Monday, Feb. 15.*

**Tuesday, February 16.** Using animals

- The APLAC’s Mission. [https://labanimals.stanford.edu/](https://labanimals.stanford.edu/)

**Thursday, February 18.** Valuing animals


**Week 8: The Environment**

**Tuesday, February 23.** Should Stanford divest from fossil fuel companies?


**February 25.** Why value the environment and how?


**Week 9: Homelessness**

**March 1.** Do the homeless have a right to lie on the sidewalk?


**March 3.** Homelessness and freedom

Week 10: Terrorism and Torture

March 8. Who may condemn an act of terrorism?


March 10. How does terrorism compare to torture?


*Third paper due by 12PM Monday, March 14.*

Course Information and Policies

Readings: All of the readings for the course are posted in the Resources section of the course’s Canvas site. You should read the material before the lectures in which it will be discussed. At the end of each Thursday lecture I will let you know what will be covered in the next week and how to approach the readings. Important note: Tuesday readings will usually be less theoretical and easier to get through while Thursday readings will be more academic, abstract, and generally more demanding. I urge you to begin reading for Thursday over the weekend.

Lectures: Lectures will be Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:30AM-11:50AM in 60-120. I expect attendance at all lectures. Failure to attend lectures will lead to a lower participation grade. I will encourage questions, comments, and discussion about the readings during lecture, and it will help you prepare for writing your papers to participate during lecture.

Section: Section attendance is mandatory, and you must register for a section through Canvas. Participation in section is an important part of the course, since it is the time when you will have the most extensive opportunity to discuss the issues raised in the readings and lectures.

Office Hours: My office hours will be Thursdays from 3:00-4:00 in my office, which is Room 375 in the Law School (Crown Quadrangle). If you can’t make it at this time, don’t hesitate to ask to meet me at another time – I’ll be more than happy to schedule a time to meet. I encourage you to come to office hours often; engaging in one-on-one or small group discussions is perhaps the best way to improve your ability to engage in the kind of philosophical discourse that will occur in section, and that I will encourage in lecture as well. If you have friends in the class, feel free to come as a small group. Also, you need not have any very specific questions to ask if you come to office hours; coming to discuss the topics that we’re covering in a rather general manner is just fine.

Late Papers: Late papers will be penalized one grade-step (e.g. a B to a B-) for each day that a paper is late, with a maximum penalty of one full grade (e.g. a B to a C).
Students with Documented Disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae).

The Stanford University Honor Code is a part of this course: It is Stanford’s statement on academic integrity first written by Stanford students in 1921. It articulates university expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. It is agreed to by every student who enrolls and by every instructor who accepts appointment at Stanford. The Honor Code states:

1) The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively
   a) that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive
      unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is
      to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
   b) that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as
      themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.

2) The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining
   from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to
   prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as
   practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.

3) While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the
   students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable
   academic work.

Penalties for violation of the Honor Code can be serious (e.g., suspension, and even
expulsion).

So re-read the Honor Code, understand it and abide by it.

Plagiarism: In order to clarify what is regarded as plagiarism, the Board on Judicial Affairs
adopted the following statement on May 22, 2003:
“For purposes of the Stanford University Honor Code, plagiarism is defined as the use, without
giving reasonable and appropriate credit to or acknowledging the author or source, of another
person's original work, whether such work is made up of code, formulas, ideas, language,
research, strategies, writing or other form(s).”

If you are in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism in the context of a particular assignment,
talk with the instructor.

For more details, see: https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/student-conduct-process/honor-code-and-fundamental-standard/additional-resources/what-plagiarism