PRESENT MORAL PROBLEMS
Philosophy 131, Section 04
Fall 2012
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-4:00 pm
Mallinckrodt 305

Instructors

Mr. Eric Brown
Wilson 213
office hours: TuTh 1:30-2:30, and by app't.
office phone: 935-4257
eabrown@wustl.edu

Ms. Anna Christensen
Wilson 116
office hours: Wed 1-2:30, and by app't.
office phone: 935-7913
a.christensen@wustl.edu

Description

This section will focus primarily on the philosophical problems generated by thinking about everyday moral decisions, such as those concerning food, sex, and drugs.

Goals

We would like every student who completes this course to understand better what philosophy is and to believe more fully that philosophy is a worthwhile human pursuit, even if we do not all pursue it to the same degree. (We'd be tickled if a few of you decided that you wanted to pursue it more yourselves. But you don't have to love something for yourself in order to value the activity, and our primary goal is that you value philosophical activity.)

We would also like every student who completes this course to be better at thinking critically, at reading difficult material, at presenting thoughts orally, and at writing effectively and efficiently. These skills are central to philosophy, but of course not merely to philosophy.

Finally, we would like, for ourselves, to get a little clearer about how to live well. We expect that thinking through some present moral problems with some smart readings and some smart readers and discussants (you!) will help.

Prerequisites

Curiosity. Willingness to treat others' views seriously, respectfully, and sympathetically. Commitment to work hard reading puzzling essays, thinking about difficult questions, and writing up to very high standards. Courage to think through difficult matters and volunteer thoughts that one might later come to reject.
We will be happy to accommodate those with disabilities, in accordance with the university's established procedures. Please contact us confidentially.

**Grading and Requirements**

The requirements and grading procedures are designed to foster the development of the skills mentioned above, under the course's goals.

**Preparation** (reading, thinking). To prepare for our discussions, we need to study the readings carefully. Try to outline what the author's main claim is, what her principal reasons for that claim are, what alternative position(s) she considers, and the reason(s) why she does not adopt those alternatives. To reward you for doing this work, there will be seven unannounced quizzes during the course of the semester. Each quiz will comprise ten true-false or multiple-choice questions about the required reading for that day's class. Each question will count for two points, and your top five quiz scores will count toward your preparation grade. 100 points

**Participation** (presenting orally, thinking). The class will proceed largely by discussion. Everyone is expected to raise questions (about the issues, about the reading, about what someone else in the class said), to offer possible answers to any such questions, and to point to the text both in asking and answering questions. We will keep track of participation, and we will reward those who participate regularly with especially succinct, clear, and stimulating remarks and questions. Conversely, we will penalize those who fail to participate regularly or whose participation falls short of expected succinctness, clarity, and stimulation. Quality counts more than quantity. Also, though we doubt we will need to invoke this, we reserve the right to penalize still more harshly any who manage to disrupt the classroom. Causes of disruption include arriving late or departing early (without a written excuse), leaving the room during class without a medical emergency, talking without being recognized during class, **having a computer or other electronic device on during the class**, having a cellular phone or other electronic device beep or ring during class, or otherwise engaging in activities other than attending to class during class. Also, although we will prefer to have the discussion proceed voluntarily, we will (if need be) call on students unprompted, and an inability to address the issues at hand will be noted. 100 points

**Essays** (writing, thinking). Each week, we will fix on at least one question for that week's essays, based on the discussions in class. These questions will be distributed by email Thursday afternoon. If you are interested in one of these questions and have the time, you should write an essay addressing it, and submit the essay as a .doc file attached to an email to Anna Christensen (a.christensen@wustl.edu) by noon the following Monday. (If you especially would like to write on a particular question, you should raise it in class. If the question only occurs to you after Thursday's class, email us to clear the question.) The last date to submit your first essay is October 1; the last to submit your second (unrevised) essay is November 12; and the last date to submit your last (unrevised) essay is December 10. But you are strongly encouraged not to submit your essays on these days, but to write your essays when you have the time and interest to...
write well. Each essay, worth 100 points, should be between 900 and 1200 words in length (shorter or longer essays are subject to penalties) and will be assessed in accordance with the guidelines appended to this syllabus. Because everyone has choices about when to submit their essays, there will be **no excuses for tardy submissions**. Any essay that is late will be penalized by 10 points for every 24 hours or fraction thereof. 300 points

**Revised essay** (writing, thinking). Everyone is required to revise one of their three unrevised essays and submit it as a .doc file attached to an email to Anna Christensen (a.christensen@wustl.edu) by **noon** on the **Monday** two weeks after the original was submitted. (This means that you cannot revise the last essay you submit unless you submit that last essay by November 26.) Revised essays are graded on their own terms, with adjustment for the extent of improvement. Note well that good essays that show very little improvement will receive lower grades than they did originally. Revision is a matter of rethinking the essay from the ground up; it goes far, far beyond mere copy-editing. See the guidelines appended to this syllabus. 100 points

These factors yield 600 possible points, and the scale used to convert the scores into quality grades will be at least as generous as the standard (98% A+, 93% A, 90% A-, 88% B+, etc.). We reserve the right to disregard a student's grade on one paper in exceptional circumstances (e.g., death in the family or severe medical difficulties) or to disregard the grade on a student's first paper if that student shows remarkable progress.

Pass/fail students must achieve at least 450 points to pass.

Any student who submits any work that does not conform to the University policy on academic integrity, printed in the Course Listings, will automatically fail the course, and will be subject to University disciplinary action. Each assignment you turn in must be your own work, and it must have been written specifically for this class. This should not be difficult, as you should not be doing extra research on any of these assignments. If you feel you must read other sources, be sure to cite them for any point you borrow (even when you have thoroughly paraphrased the point). To fail to cite sources for their points is one way of plagiarizing.

**Texts**

Just one required text has been ordered at the Mallinckrodt bookstore.


Most of the required readings are chapters in this volume, and are listed as such in the syllabus, with the abbreviation 'EiP' and the chapter number. The remaining required readings are (or shortly will be) available as pdf files at Olin library's Ares reserve site. To use Ares, you'll need
to search for this section at ares.wustl.edu, and you'll need the password, which will be distributed in class and via email.

**Syllabus of Readings**

Tu Aug 28  Introduction

UNIT ONE: FOOD PROBLEMS

Obligations to feed people

Th Aug 30  Introductions to EiP, on pp. 1-15
Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (EiP 56)

Tu Sep 4  Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code" (EiP 57)

Th Sep 6  NO CLASS

Tu Sep 11  Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality" (Ares)

Th Sep 13  Rawls, "A Theory of Justice" (EiP 52)

Tu Sep 18  Nozick, "The Entitlement Theory of Justice" (EiP 53)

Th Sep 20  Young, "Displacing the Distributive Paradigm" (EiP 54)

Obligations to the environment and to animals

Tu Sep 25  Rolston, "Feeding People versus Saving Nature" (EiP 59)

Th Sep 27  In-class viewing of Food, Inc.

Tu Oct 2  Leopold, "The Land Ethic" (EiP 60)
Hill, "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments" (EiP 62)

Th Oct 4  Singer, "All Animals are Equal" (EiP 14)
Frey, "Moral Standing, the Value of Lives, and Speciesism" (EiP 16)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tu Oct 9</td>
<td>Fox, &quot;The Moral Community&quot; (EiP 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regan, &quot;The Case for Animal Rights&quot; (EiP 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Oct 11</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNIT TWO: SEX PROBLEMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sex and the natural</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Oct 16</td>
<td>Punzo, &quot;Morality and Human Sexuality&quot; (EiP 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goldman, &quot;Plain Sex&quot; (EiP 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Oct 18</td>
<td><strong>Humanae Vitae</strong>, Papal encyclical by Pope Paul VI (Google it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corvino, &quot;Homosexuality and the Moral Relevance of Experience&quot; (EiP 27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Oct 23</td>
<td>Rawls, &quot;The Idea of Public Reason Revisited&quot; (Ares)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sex and consent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Oct 25</td>
<td>Pineau, &quot;Date Rape&quot; (EiP 42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May and Strikwerda, &quot;Men in Groups&quot; (EiP 43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Oct 30</td>
<td>Mill, &quot;Freedom of Thought and Discussion&quot; (EiP 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brison, &quot;The Price We Pay?&quot; (EiP 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altman, &quot;The Right to Get Turned On&quot; (EiP 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sex and consequences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Nov 1</td>
<td>Thomson, &quot;A Defense of Abortion&quot; (EiP 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Nov 6</td>
<td>Warren, &quot;On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion&quot; (EiP 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Nov 8</td>
<td>Marquis, &quot;An Argument that Abortion is Wrong&quot; (EiP 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Nov 13</td>
<td>Little, &quot;The Moral Permissibility of Abortion&quot; (EiP 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hursthouse, &quot;Virtue Theory and Abortion&quot; (EiP 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th Nov 15</td>
<td>Foot, &quot;The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect&quot; (Ares)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NB: Read Anscombe's brief reply, printed at the end of the same pdf, too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Nov 20</td>
<td>Anderson, &quot;Is Women's Labor a Commodity?&quot; (EiP 21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Th Nov 22  NO CLASS — Thanksgiving

UNIT THREE: DRUG PROBLEMS

Paternalism

Tu Nov 27  Mill, "Freedom of Action" (EiP 28)
Hunt, "On Improving People by Political Means" (EiP 29)

Th Nov 29  Wilson, "Against the Legalization of Drugs" (EiP 30)
Husak, "Why we should Decriminalize Drug Use" (EiP 31)

Enhancement

Tu Dec 4  Sandel, "The Case against Perfection" (Ares)
Anderson, "Why Cognitive Enhancement is in Your Future (and Your Past)" (Ares)

Th Dec 6  Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?" (Ares)
SOME GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

These guidelines should help any writer who seeks to persuade his or her audience of a contestable point. They also explain the grading priorities in this class.

MATTERS OF FORM

1. There is no excuse for typographical, orthographical, or grammatical errors. Nor is there any excuse for those errors of diction that are not easily ensnared in the nets of grammar and orthography. You can avoid most of these errors by sticking to words that you know very well in their written form, remaining on friendly terms with a good dictionary, and editing carefully. When you edit, you should look for the common errors of grammar and style that William Safire summarizes as follows:

   No sentence fragments. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read. A writer must not shift your point of view. Reserve the apostrophe for it’s proper use and omit it when its not needed. Write all adverbial forms correct. In their writing, everyone should make sure that their pronouns agree with its antecedent. Use the semicolon properly, use it between complete but related thoughts; and not between an independent clause and a mere phrase. Don’t use no double negatives. Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration. If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times: Resist hyperbole. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is. Avoid commas, that are not necessary. Verbs has to agree with their subjects. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky. And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction. The passive voice should never be used. Writing carefully, dangling participles should be avoided. Unless you are quoting other people’s exclamations, kill all exclamation points!!! Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out. Use parallel structure when you write and in speaking. You should just avoid confusing readers with misplaced modifiers. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences—such as those of ten or more words—to their antecedents. Eschew dialect, irregardless. Remember to never split an infinitive. Take the bull by the hand and don’t mix metaphors. Don’t verb nouns. Always pick on the correct idiom. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies. "Avoid overuse of ‘quotation "marks.’"" Never use prepositions to end a sentence with. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.

Editing can be tricky business. Seek out a friend for a fresh perspective on your writing or the Writing Center in Eads Hall 111 (935-4981) for help in learning how to learn to edit.

2. Writing that is free from error is not yet good writing. Prose style is difficult to cultivate except by practice, but there are some general guidelines worth learning. Great prose is concise (it wastes no words), precise (it says what it means), and concrete (it does not use hazy concepts whose meaning is contested). Several guidebooks provide helpful advice about how to achieve concise, precise, and concrete prose; in particular, Joseph Williams' Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace is worth reviewing periodically. Among the most helpful general pieces of advice are these:
avoids passive constructions in favor of active ones; 
forgo the verb 'to be' for more determinate verbs; 
be wary of abstract (Latinate) nouns and prefer concrete (Anglo-Saxon) words; 
shun jargon and technical vocabulary except where nothing less wieldy will do (and in 
these cases explain each term that you introduce); 
prefer simple constructions to more ornate ones; and 
use similes, metaphors, and intensifying adjectives and adverbs (e.g., 'very') sparingly.

Some common advice is potentially corrupting, though. You might have heard the following lies:

(1) Formal writing avoids the first-person pronoun. Wrong. If you receive an invitation in 
the third person, you should reply in the third person. But this arcane etiquette does 
not apply to persuasive writing, and anyone who tries to make it apply will struggle to 
avoid pomposity.

(2) Good writing needs a catchy introduction. Misleading. Good writing catches its 
intended audience's interest. But what will do that depends upon the intended 
audience's interests. We, for example, respond well to a crisp statement of a problem 
we find interesting.

(3) A thesaurus is a great tool. Misleading. A thesaurus can help you find the right word if 
you use it to jog your memory or alongside a dictionary. Too many students use the 
thesaurus to find apparently impressive words that they barely understand.

In addition to collecting and reviewing advice, one who aspires to write great prose should 
cultivate taste for great prose. Make a habit of reading in The New Yorker, Harper's, or The 
Atlantic Monthly, and seek out the essays of past masters of English prose such as Orwell and 
E.B. White.

MATTERS OF CONTENT

3. Of course, you are responsible for writing on themes of this course.

4. You are also responsible for showing an understanding of the assigned readings. This 
requires two things. First, it requires that you not misinterpret what we are reading. Do not fail to 
distinguish one character's views from the author's views, and heed the context of every remark. 
Second, it requires that you cite the relevant text for any claim that you attribute to someone or 
for any claim or argument that you borrow from someone. Your citations should follow a style 
sheet in Gordon Harvey's Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students (Hackett, 1998) or The 
Chicago Manual of Style.

5. The most essential ingredient in a well-written argumentative paper is a clearly formulated 
thesis, that is, a contestable claim that the author intends to support. You should explicitly state 
the claim you are arguing for, and most of the time, you should state the thesis at the start of the 
paper. You should also organize your paper around the defense of your thesis, so choose your 
thesis carefully.
6. The first part of an adequate defense of any interesting thesis is a clear argument (or set of arguments) that supports the thesis. It should be obvious to the reader how many arguments you think you have in your favor, and what the premises of each argument are. Paragraphs should be constructed in such a way that the skeleton of the argumentative structure is obvious. Note that the kind of argument you need depends upon the kind of thesis you are advancing. Sometimes, a piece of textual evidence counts as an argument. Sometimes, it does not.

7. The second part of an adequate defense of any interesting thesis is a consideration of the best possible objection(s) to the thesis and a reply to the objection(s). Considering and responding to objections is like showing your work on a math exam. If you are making textual claims, you should consider textual evidence that raises doubts about your claims. If you are making more fully developed arguments, you should consider possible objections to one or more of your premises (but hopefully not to your inferences, which should be unimpeachable). And you should always consider the best reason to deny your thesis itself.

8. If the thesis is clear, the argumentative structure well-conceived, the objection(s) and reply(ies) present, and if all of this is presented concisely and precisely and without errors, then the paper is very good. The difference between the very good papers and the great ones lies in the interest of the thesis, the style of the prose, and the cleverness, imagination, insight, and sheer intelligence of the argumentation.

ABOUT REVISIONS

To revise an essay requires far more than editing it to correct its most obvious flaws. Revision requires rethinking the entire essay from ground up. What exactly is the thesis? Do I have at least one good argument to support exactly this thesis? How would someone argue against my thesis, or object to my argument(s), and how can I answer them? With distance from one's essay, and with criticisms from another reader, one should recognize ways in which one can improve one's thesis, argument(s), or response to objections. The goal is not to minimize or maximize the number of changes one makes. The goal is, as it ever was, to craft a persuasive essay.

SUMMARY OF AVAILABLE HELP

Do not skip on the background help available in the guidebooks mentioned here.

For help organizing your thoughts and editing your paper, use the Writing Center, located in Eads 111. It provides free writing help for all Wash U students; to make an appointment, call 935-4981. I am also available to help you organize your thoughts. Unfortunately, I cannot read drafts. But if you have some ideas but no clear thought about how to organize them, seek me out.

To test your prose style, read it aloud. Better: have someone else read it aloud to you.
To test the clarity of your thesis and argumentation, ask a friend to read the paper, and ask him or her what your main point is and why you advance it.

There is also a very helpful set of suggestions, by Jim Pryor (philosophy professor at NYU), at http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html.