

# Contemporary Moral Problems

PHIL 1304.001

Summer II, 2018

Instructor: Dr. Kenneth Williford

Meeting Time: M-Th, 10:30-12:30

Meeting Place: Science Hall (SH) 333

Office and Office Hours: 305 Carlisle Hall  
M-W 2:00-3:30PM & By Appointment

## Course Dates

July 10-August 9, 2018

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**Course description.** This course is an introduction to ethical theory through the analysis of contemporary moral issues. The issues explored in depth vary from section to section, but the courses typically cover some of the following: abortion, war and terrorism, drugs and drug prohibition, stem cell research and other issues in medical ethics, wealth, poverty and economic policies, sexual ethics. In order to introduce ethical theory, the instructor must also introduce all areas of philosophy (logic, epistemology, and metaphysics) as well as a fair amount of the history of philosophy. The proper framing of the controversial issues debated in the course requires discussion of classics of Western philosophy (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Hume, J.S. Mill, Kant), as well as more contemporary authors. In addition, this proper framing of the issues also involves discussion of the interplay of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic heritage (and sometimes other religious heritages) with the philosophical heritage, on the one hand, and contemporary economic and political ideas on the other. Thus, students of this course get an introduction not only to moral problems and debates, they also get an introduction to Western philosophy and civilization in a contemporary, complex, global context.

Since moral issues and debates often arise from cultural and religious heritages in confrontation with the demands and changes of the contemporary culture, these aspects of the problematic are essential to effective teaching of this course. The course is a philosophy course and so students learn, above all, how to assess moral principles and arguments. However, the proper teaching of the course involves introducing and considering moral problems from a variety of points of view and with a sensitivity to their origins.

Students also investigate questions about the nature of societies and various types of institutions and groupings that have been considered ethically important in one context or another (families, tribes, clans, nations, races, linguistic communities, religions, species, etc.). They learn to ask critical questions about these groupings and to try come up with a coherent understanding of what social responsibility consists in and what it is, exactly, to which one is responsible when one is said to be “responsible to society”.

***This course satisfies the University of Texas at Arlington core curriculum requirement in Language, Philosophy & Culture.***

**Learning outcomes.** Students will gain a better understanding of the arguments supporting different ethical positions. Students will also improve their ability to evaluate the strength of arguments and some of the common mistakes that occur in reasoning. Since a significant portion of the class will be devoted to

discussions, students will develop their ability to communicate clearly and coherently about issues that are challenging and often polarizing and emotionally fraught. Students will gain knowledge about the cultural and historical perspectives brought to bear in the creation of arguments.

### **Core curriculum objectives.**

- **Critical Thinking Skills:** to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.
- **Communication Skills:** to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
- **Social Responsibility:** to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national and global communities.
- **Personal Responsibility:** to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.

**Signature assignments.** The following assignments (among others) may be used to assess the student's level of achievement of the Core Curriculum Objectives:

1. Each student will analyze an argumentative passage pertaining to a contemporary ethical controversy in order to determine which proposition functions as the conclusion of the argument and which propositions function as the premises. (Critical Thinking Skills)
2. Each student will participate in a group project in which the objective is (a) to take a position on a matter of personal or social responsibility (such as voting or recycling) and support that position with reasons; and (b) write a collaborative essay setting forth the argument. (Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Social Responsibility, Personal Responsibility)

**Required Texts** (The one required book should be available at the UTA Bookstore.)

*Four Futures: Life after Capitalism*, Peter Frase, Verso, 2016

All other texts (articles, course notes, PowerPoint slides, etc.) required for this course will be made available on Blackboard. Note that since this is a course on *contemporary* moral problems readings may be adopted that are sensitive to current events and may include news articles that are up to date (hence they are not listed specifically below). Readings for a week will be announced the week before on Blackboard. The readings will be from publicly available sources or sources accessible through the UTA library. We may also watch clips from relevant documentaries or new releases in class.

### **Evaluation**

- (1) Attendance, participation (25%)
- (2) One take-home essay exam (25%)
- (3) Five quizzes (25%)
- (4) An in-class final exam (25%)

#### *Attendance and Participation*

Attendance will be taken everyday; a student may have up to two unexcused absences without this affecting his or her grade adversely. For each further unexcused absence the attendance/participation score will be reduced by 10 points. Participation will be noted throughout the session. The more you participate in discussions, raise

questions about the readings, give your own arguments and counter-arguments, etc., the higher your participation grade.

#### *Five Quizzes*

There will be a quiz at the end of each class week over the material covered and readings assigned that week.

#### *Take-home Essay Exam*

On Monday, July 23, I will assign a take-home examination consisting of three short answer questions. Each answer will need to be no more than two pages in length (typed, double-spaced, and in a 12-point font). In order to answer the questions adequately, the student will need to be familiar with the reading and lecture material. Your answers will be due in class on Monday, July 30.

#### *In-class Final Exam*

The in-class final will be an essay exam consisting of three to four questions. It will be cumulative. The exam may also contain a vocabulary portion. It will be on the scheduled exam day for this course: **Monday, August 13, 10:30-12:30.**

### **Course Schedule**

FF=*Four Futures: Life after Capitalism*

Q=Quiz

#### Week 1 (7/10-12)

Tu 7/10: Introduction—Basic Philosophical Distinctions, Argumentation, Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Ethics, Moral Psychology

W 7/11: Basic Ethical Theory—Deontology (Kantianism), Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, Egoism, Theological Ethics

Th 7/12: Background Concepts—Personal Identity, Free Will, Moral Responsibility, Realism, Subjectivism, Cognitivism, Expressivism(**Q1**)

#### Week 2 (7/16-19) (Readings and Viewings TBA on Blackboard)

M 7/16: Drugs and Drug Prohibition—Facts, Drugs and the Brain, Addiction, Individual Liberty and Responsibility

Tu 7/17: Drugs and Drug Prohibition—Politics, Wars on Drugs, Incarceration, Harm Minimization

W 7/18: The Ethics of Eating—On Being Carnivorous, Vegetarianism, Veganism

Th 7/29: The Ethics of Eating—Animal Rights, Animal Pain, Health and the Environment (**Q2**)

## Course Schedule Continued

### Week 3 (7/23-26) (Readings and Viewings TBA on Blackboard)

M 7/23: War and Occupation—Facts and History, Genocide, War Crimes (**Midterm Assigned**)

Tu 7/24: War and Occupation—Just War Theory, Pacifism

W 7/25: War and Occupation—War Profiteering

Th 7/26: War and Occupation—Review and further Analysis of Moral Arguments (**Q3**)

### Week 4 (7/30-8/2) (Readings and Viewings TBA in Blackboard)

M 7/30 Religious Liberty—Facts and History, Religion, Science, and Politics(**Midterm Due**)

Tu 7/31: Religious Liberty—Limits to Religious Liberty? Religious Discrimination and Discrimination based on Religion

W 8/1: Religious Liberty—Religious Education; Religion, Science and Medicine

Th 8/2: Religious Liberty—Review and further Analysis of Moral Arguments (**Q4**)

### Week 5 (8/6-9) (This week will be devoted to *Four Futures*.)

M 8/6: FF, Intro, Ch. 1. Topics: Social and Political Phil, Phil of Technology, Ecology, Economics, Communism, Marxism, Equality, Abundance

Tu 8/7: FF, Ch. 2. Topics: Capitalism, Hierarchy, Abundance, Rentism, Neo-Liberalism, Private Property, Intellectual Property

W 8/8: FF, Ch. 3. Topics: Socialism, Equality, Scarcity, Markets, Ecological Constraints, Externalities, Pessimism

Th 8/9: FF, Ch. 4, Conclusion. Topics: Exterminism, Scarcity, Hierarchy, Oppression, Genocide, Wealth, Inequality (**Q5**)

**Final Exam: Monday, August 13, 10:30-12:30PM in 333 Science Hall**

**NB: July 21 Last day to drop classes; submit requests to advisor prior to 4:00 pm.**

## IMPORTANT POLICIES OF MINE

**Blackboard:** I will be using Blackboard in this class to post the syllabus, handouts, announcements, links, supplementary readings, slides, class notes, and any class recordings. Be sure to check it regularly.  
(<https://elearn.uta.edu/>)

**Late Work:** All late work will be docked a full letter grade for every day that it is late.

**Laptops and Phones:** In my class I do not allow students to use laptops, smartphones, or other electronic devices without special permission. Any note taking must be done the old fashioned way. If I see laptops or smart phones out during class, I will ask you to put them up. If you won't put your device away, I will ask you to leave class.

**Homework for Other Courses:** Students are not allowed to read for or do homework for other courses while in my class.

**Incompletes:** I will not give a student a grade of Incomplete (I), unless he or she has a compelling, and documented, reason (e.g., a medical emergency).

**Plagiarism:** No student should have any doubt about what counts as plagiarism. I will assume that every student in this class has seen this tutorial provided by the UTA library and have taken the quiz embedded in it: <http://library.uta.edu/plagiarism/index.php>. All cases of plagiarism will be turned over to the Office of Student Conduct.

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES & OTHER USEFUL PIECES OF INFORMATION

**Attendance:** At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required but attendance is a critical indicator in student success. Each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I will follow the policy outlined above. However, while UT Arlington does not require instructors to take attendance in their courses, the U.S. Department of Education requires that the University have a mechanism in place to mark when Federal Student Aid recipients "begin attendance in a course." UT Arlington instructors will report when students begin attendance in a course as part of the final grading process. Specifically, when assigning a student a grade of F, faculty report the last date a student attended their class based on evidence such as a test, participation in a class project or presentation, or an engagement online via Blackboard. This date is reported to the Department of Education for federal financial aid recipients.

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://web.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**Disability Accommodations:** UT Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, *The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA)*, and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the

form of a letter certified by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD). Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting:

The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD) [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or calling 817-272-3364.

Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS) [www.uta.edu/caps/](http://www.uta.edu/caps/) or calling 817-272-3671.

Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Title IX:** *The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit [uta.edu/eos](http://uta.edu/eos). For information regarding Title IX, visit [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX).*

**Academic Integrity:** Students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

**Student Support Services:** UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources).

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**Final Review Week:** A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**The English Writing Center (411LIBR):** Hours are 9 am to 8 pm Mondays-Thursdays, 9 am to 3 pm Fridays and Noon to 5 pm Saturdays and Sundays. Walk In Quick Hits sessions during all open hours Mon-Thurs. Register and make appointments online at <http://uta.mywconline.com>. Classroom Visits, Workshops, and advanced services for graduate students and faculty are also available. Please see [www.uta.edu/owl](http://www.uta.edu/owl) for detailed information.

#### **Library Info:**

Library Home Page	<a href="http://www.uta.edu/library">http://www.uta.edu/library</a>
Subject Guides	<a href="http://libguides.uta.edu">http://libguides.uta.edu</a>
Subject Librarians	<a href="http://www.uta.edu/library/help/subject-librarians.php">http://www.uta.edu/library/help/subject-librarians.php</a>
Library Tutorials	<a href="http://www.uta.edu/library/help/tutorials.php">http://www.uta.edu/library/help/tutorials.php</a>
Connect Off- Campus	<a href="http://libguides.uta.edu/offcampus">http://libguides.uta.edu/offcampus</a>
Ask A Librarian	<a href="http://ask.uta.edu">http://ask.uta.edu</a>

**Campus Carry:** Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>

**Emergency Exit Procedures:** Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist handicapped individuals.

**Emergency Phone Numbers:** In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at **817-272-3003** (non-campus phone), **2-3003** (campus phone). You may also dial 911. Non-emergency number **817-272-3381**.