

Philosophy 104 – Ethics (Quest II – Sustainability) – Spring 2015
Syllabus

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Schedule/Location: 12:40-1:40 MWF, Sage 1235

Office hours: 2:00-3:00 MWF, Radford 327

Texts: *Moral Philosophy: A Reader* (4th edition), by Louis P. Pojman;

Selected readings from *Environmental Ethics* (6th Edition), by Louis P. Pojman & Paul Pojman will be available on our Desire2Learn site.

About the class

As an introductory course in ethics and a “Quest II” course in the University Studies Program (USP), this class has two purposes. The first is to introduce you to the sub-field of philosophy that uses *moral reasoning* to form and evaluate “moral theories” – theories of right and wrong action. The second is to acquaint you with the idea of *sustainability* and to examine some of the moral issues it raises. In so doing, this course addresses the USP’s “signature question” on sustainability: “How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?”, with the emphasis here on ‘understand’. It contributes to the USP’s goal of providing you with *knowledge of sustainability and its applications*: “the ability to understand local and global earth systems; the qualities of ecological integrity and the means to restore and preserve it; and the interconnection of ecological integrity, social justice, and economic well-being.”

On Moral Reasoning

The philosophical analysis of moral reasoning focuses on how everyday moral judgments – judgments of actions as being morally right or wrong – fall into patterns called “moral theories”. In a moral theory, principles of right and wrong action are not simply asserted as commands, as they might be in a religious or a legal system. Rather, they are *logically argued* for. All of the philosophers we will be studying – including Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Immanuel Kant – have tried to find a *rational* or a *natural* (as opposed to supernatural) basis for morality, arguing that at least some moral principles are as objectively true as the principles of science or mathematics. In so doing, they have mapped out some of the main ways in which proposed moral principles can be both justified and criticized.

In this class, no moral theory will be presented as the correct one. Strengths and weaknesses of each theory will be discussed, and you will make up your own mind regarding which (if any) comes closest to being correct. More importantly, you will learn a variety of concepts that should enable you to think more clearly about *your own* moral theory, whatever it may be. In the process, you will also be learning two of the main methods of philosophy: critical reasoning and the imaginative consideration of particular cases.

The Application of Moral Reasoning To The Topic Of Sustainability

While there many definitions of ‘sustainability’ (and we will examine several), the following one is offered by Brian Kermath, head of UW Oshkosh’s Office of Sustainability-

“Sustainable development or more simply *sustainability* is a societal condition where people of a community live quality lives, meeting their needs in ways that permit other people everywhere to do the same now and into the distant future. Sustainable communities are nurturing places where people prosper and cultures thrive; they maintain capital stocks including environmental services and natural capital; they are characterized by a diversity of ideas, economic activities, and landscapes; and they achieve social justice in seeking equity, while maintaining freedom and opportunities for all citizens.”

This definition expresses a number of *values* – views of what a *good life* involves – that form the basis of at least two of the moral theories we will be studying in this course. First, the idea that a morally right action is one that helps all those affected live a “quality life” forms the basis of various kinds of *utilitarianism*. Roughly, utilitarianism is the view that morally right actions are those that produce the most happiness, security, or social welfare for everyone affected by them. By contrast, the values of “social justice”, “equity”, and “freedom” mentioned at the end of the definition form the basis of *non-utilitarian* moral theories. Sometimes these different kinds of moral theories seem to conflict with each other. For instance, if it so happened that one could produce the most happiness or security only by severely restricting the freedom of individuals, a utilitarian theory might require such a policy, while a non-utilitarian theory might prohibit it. *The question of how different – and sometimes conflicting – moral theories differently evaluate policies aimed at promoting sustainability* is a central theme of this course.

Definitions of ‘sustainability’ like the one above raise further philosophical issues that we will be discussing in this course. For instance, it describes *sustainable communities* as “nurturing places where people prosper and cultures thrive; they maintain capital stocks including environmental services and natural capital; they are characterized by a diversity of ideas, economic activities, and landscapes; and they achieve social justice...” Since this list focuses almost entirely on *human* goods and activities, it suggests that the *non-human* environment – including other animal species – has (as “natural capital”) only *instrumental value*: its value depends on how it can be *used as an instrument* to achieve some further goal considered to be “intrinsically valuable” or “good in itself”, namely the satisfaction of *human* needs. The distinction between *intrinsic* and *instrumental* values plays a key role in moral theories, and we will spend some time exploring how different theories divide values into these categories. We will also explore arguments for and against the view that nature has intrinsic – in addition to merely instrumental – value.

Quest II Philosophy Courses and A Liberal Arts Education

A liberal arts education such as the one you are pursuing at UWO exposes you to many of the historical and contemporary ideas and events that have shaped our lives. It increases your awareness of the world’s complexity and of thought’s diversity – quite literally, it expands your

mind. While it may not teach you how to do any *specific* job, it develops skills that are increasingly necessary in *any* job, including the ability to understand complicated readings on unfamiliar subjects, to express your thoughts clearly and persuasively, and to reason critically, creatively, and independently. In addition to introducing you to philosophical methodology, moral theories, and the application of moral theories to sustainability issues, this Quest II course is designed to help you develop all these skills.

Learning Outcomes

Students can expect to leave this course with an enhanced ability to:

1. Identify and describe the logical components of philosophical arguments.
2. Describe and explain what philosophers mean by ‘moral reasoning’.
3. Identify, explain, and compare several different definitions of ‘sustainability’.
4. Identify, explain and evaluate some of the most influential theories of value.
5. Identify, explain, and evaluate some of the most influential moral theories.
6. Think critically about moral issues related to the goal of achieving sustainability.
7. Employ moral theories to devise arguments both for and against policies that bear on the goal of sustainability.

ePortfolio

Your ePortfolio, which can be found in Desire2Learn (UWO’s main online resource), allows you to store important papers, speeches, reports, projects, and other assignments from your Quest and Explore courses. This allows you both to document your educational progress and to connect the topics covered in different classes. You can continue to use the ePortfolio even in your non-USP classes; doing so might help you to prepare for your Capstone experience as you near graduation. Finally, after graduation you can use the materials in your ePortfolio to provide evidence of your knowledge and ability to learn challenging material to employers or graduate schools. In all of your USP courses, at least one assignment will be designed to be uploaded to your ePortfolio. In this course, that assignment will be your final essay, which will be due the last week of class.

Grading

Your final grade will be based on letter grades assigned to the following course components, weighted according to the following percentages: quizzes 20%; final essay 15%; *on time completion* of your learning diary entries, 15%; exams 50%. Here is more information about each component-

Quizzes- There will be six graded quizzes, taken online and subsequently discussed in class. The lowest quiz score will be discarded before a letter grade for the sum of all quiz points is assigned at the end of the semester. ***There will be no opportunity to make up a quiz after it has been discussed in class.***

Exams- There will be three in-class exams. *To make up a missed exam, you must have written documentation of a good excuse from a medical professional or university official.* If you know that you must miss an exam, be sure to talk to me about it as soon as possible, so we can make alternate arrangements for you.

Letter Grades & Default Grading Curve- Letter grades for each of the exams and the totality of your quiz points (minus the lowest quiz score) will be based on the following default scale:

% Correct	Letter Grade	Grade points
94-100	A	4.00
90-93	A-	3.67
87-89	B+	3.33
83-86	B	3.00
80-82	B-	2.67
77-79	C+	2.33
73-76	C	2.00
70-72	C-	1.67
67-69	D+	1.33
63-66	D	1.00
60-62	D-	0.67
< 60	F	0

NOTE: this is the *default* curve because it *assumes that the class achieves a median grade of at least 77%*. However, if the median grade is *lower* than this for a given grading component (such as an exam), the percentages in the left column will be adjusted downward to better reflect that component’s difficulty. If it turns out that the median is *higher* than 77%, no adjustment will be made to the correlations between percentages and letter grades given above, so there will never be an artificial limit on the number of high grades that can be assigned. In principle, everyone *could* receive an ‘A’ in this class.

Online Learning Diary- As we work our way through the course materials, you are to write down your immediate reactions to it on D2L (in the Dropbox). Ask yourself: with which of the author’s points do you most *agree*, and why? With which do you most *disagree*, and why? These diary entries will be graded pass/fail (0 or 1). If you complete them all – and write specifically enough to indicate that you actually *did* the readings – you will receive an “A” for this component of your class grade. Each *failure* to complete an entry will result in this grade’s being lowered by one letter grade: missing one = A-; missing two = B+, and so on. Specific due dates will be announced in class, but entries 1-7 must be completed before Exam 1, 8-13 before Exam 2, and 14-19 before Exam 3.

Final Essay- The final essay will give you an opportunity to “synthesize” much of the material covered in this course. In it, you will have the opportunity to reflect on what you learned in the course, including the main moral theories and the main policy debates, and to express your personal position on them. You should find your Online Learning Diary helpful for writing this essay. It will be turned in to the D2L Dropbox, and also should be uploaded to your ePortfolio.

Miscellaneous Information

Challenging an answer choice- The correct answers to all of the questions asked in quizzes or on exams will be discussed in class. At that time, you will have an opportunity to argue for an answer choice that has been initially disallowed. For your challenge to succeed, it must be based on a reason such as the ambiguity or vagueness of a question relative to points covered in the lectures or the readings. However, simply *not understanding* a question (if it *is* understandable) is not a good reason for having selected an incorrect answer choice.

Handouts- Handouts that supplement class lectures will be available on D2L. You should print out the handouts and use them to facilitate your note-taking. Note that the handouts are not complete outlines of the lectures; some information has *intentionally* been left off of them in order to stimulate thought and discussion in class (during which gaps will be filled in).

Attendance- As stated in the Student Handbook, students “are expected to be present for each regularly scheduled class session.” I understand that occasionally students must miss a class for various reasons, but **I expect all students to attend most of the classes.** An attendance sheet will be passed around during each class.

Lack of attendance will likely lower your final grade for this class, not because it is *directly* figured into your grade, but rather because under-attendance almost always leads to deficient performance on the other graded components. You might *think* that you understand the readings and the handouts, but unless you check that hunch by listening to the lectures and class discussions (and, even better, by *participating* in class discussions), you can’t be sure.

Discussion Groups- I will *randomly* assign each student to a discussion group consisting of five students. These groups will meet periodically in class to discuss various questions. Each group will be given a “discussion topic” on D2L to use for communication (so you do not have to share your personal contact information if you do not want to), and you can use your discussion topic to organize a study group prior to an exam. However, *no student in the group should expect others in the group to tutor them or to give them their lecture notes.* If you need to be filled in on material you missed, come see me.

Learning Resources- Often in your first year of college, you discover that higher education is more difficult than you expected it to be. Perhaps you haven’t been adequately prepared in some subject area, or you have yet to develop effective study habits, or you have difficulty focusing on readings and exams. UW Oshkosh offers *many* resources for effectively dealing with such issues, including the Center for Academic Resources (which supplies tutors), the Writing Center, Project Success, and the Counseling Center. If you’re not sure where to go or to whom to speak, contact me and I’ll be happy to point you in the right direction.

Early Alert- Early Alert is a program that provides you with an Early Grade Report from faculty. Early Grade Reports indicate if you have academic performance or attendance issues and specific steps you can take to improve. You will receive an email with this Early Grade Report during the 5th week of classes. It is important to read the entire email carefully, and to take very seriously any issues it mentions.

Phil. 105 – Quest II, Sustainability – Lesson Plan Outline

Unit I – Sustainability, Morality, Value, and The Environment

(i) The Concept of Sustainability

Resource: “Sustainability Primer” [on D2L].

(ii) Preliminary Concepts of Morality

Reading: Louis Pojman’s “General Introduction: What Is Moral Philosophy?” [in Pojman]

Resource: Slide Set 1 [on D2L].

Learning Diary Entry 1

Reading: Louis Pojman's “A Defense of Ethical Objectivism” [in Pojman].

Resources: Slide Set 2 & Slide Set 3 [on D2L].

Learning Diary Entry 2

Quiz 1 covers material from (i) and (ii) [To be taken on D2L].

(iii) Concepts of Goodness and Value

Resource: Slide Set 4 [on D2L].

Reading: (1) Louis Pojman, “Value: What Is Good?” [in Pojman].

Learning Diary Entry 3

Reading: (2) Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine” [in Pojman].

Learning Diary Entry 4

(iv) Does the natural environment have intrinsic value?

Readings: (1) Holmes Rolston III, “Naturalizing Values: Organisms And Species”.
[on D2L]

Learning Diary Entry 5

(2) Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecological Movement”

Learning Diary Entry 6

(3) Arne Naess, “Ecosophy T: Deep Versus Shallow Ecology”

Learning Diary Entry 7

Quiz 2 covers material from (iii) and (iv) [to be taken on D2L].

Exam 1 covers all material in Unit I [to be taken in class].

Resource: Exam 1 Study Guide [on D2L].

Unit II – Utilitarian Moral Theories and Sustainability

(v) Sensualist Utilitarianism.

Reading: Jeremy Bentham, “Classical Hedonism” [in Pojman].

Resource: Slide Set 5 [on D2L].

Learning Diary Entry 8

(vi) Satisfactionist Utilitarianism.

Reading: John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” [in Pojman].

Resource: Slide Set 6 [on D2L].

Learning Diary Entry 9

Quiz 3 covers material from (v) and (vi) [to be taken on D2L].

(vii) Applications of Utilitarian Moral Theories To Sustainability-Related Issues.

Readings: (1) Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of The Commons”.
[on D2L]

Learning Diary Entry 10

(2) Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics”.

Learning Diary Entry 11

(3) Jacqueline Kasun, “The Unjust War against Population”.

Learning Diary Entry 12

(4) Peter Singer, “A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation”.

Learning Diary Entry 13

Quiz 4 covers material from (vii) [to be taken on D2L].

Exam 2 covers all material in Unit II [to be taken in class].

Resource: Exam 2 Study Guide [on D2L]

Unit III – Non-Utilitarian (Rationalist) Moral Theories and Sustainability

(viii) Rationalist Moral Theories.

Readings: (1) James Rachels’ “A Critique of Ethical Egoism” [in Pojman].

Resource: Slide Set 7 [on D2L].

Learning Diary Entry 14

- (2) Pojman's introduction to "Deontological Ethics".
- (3) Immanuel Kant, "The Foundations of Ethics" [in Pojman]
- (4) Immanuel Kant, "Rational Beings Alone Have Moral Worth" [on D2L]

Resources: Slide Set 8 & Slide Set 9 [on D2L].

Learning Diary Entry 15

Quiz 5 covers material from (viii) [to be taken on D2L].

(ix) Applications of Non-Utilitarian Moral Theories to Sustainability-Related Issues.

Readings:

[on D2L] (1) Holly L. Wilson, "The Green Kant: Kant's Treatment of Animals"

Learning Diary Entry 16

(2) Tom Regan, "The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights"

Learning Diary Entry 17

(3) Mary Anne Warren, "A Critique of Regan's Animal Rights Theory"

Learning Diary Entry 18

Quiz 6 covers material from (ix) [to be taken on D2L].

Exam 3 covers all material in Unit III [to be taken in class].

Final Essay (due the last day of the semester, in both the D2L Dropbox and your ePortfolio).
The specific assignment is posted on D2L.