

PHI 2603 – ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY
Dr. Mountcastle

Course Description:

Explores the fundamental problems of Western ethics, the classical and Judeo-Christian traditions, modern ideals of the good for the individual business, politics, and the environment. (Gordon Rule Course) and (General Studies Course: HUM/VAL)

Text:

Porter: *Reasons for Living*

Sessions

Topics

Preliminary Questions

1. What is “Ethics”? What is the greatest good and what principles should guide our moral decisions?
2. Are ethical norms inherent in the Universe? No! Ethical relativism, Yes! Ethical realism
3. Are we free to make moral choices? No! Fatalism, Predestination and Determinism
Yes! Ought, Regret, Judgement and Thinking

Major Ethical Systems

Humanism: Human Nature defines the Greatest Good

4. Hedonism: Be selfish and seek pleasure! (Aristippus, Epicurus)
5. Utilitarianism: Think of others! (Bentham, Mill)
6. Self Realization: Be a whole, virtuous person (Plato, Aristotle, Patterson, Wright, Fromm)
7. Existentialism: Be responsible! (Satre)

Naturalism: Natural Laws define the Greatest Good

8. Egoism: Be a survivor! (Darwin, Spencer, Nietzsche)
9. Authoritarianism: Rule with an iron fist! (Machiavelli, Hobbes)
10. Ecologism: Go with the flow of Nature! (Lao Tzu, Thoreau)
11. Democracy: Respect the inalienable Rights of Natural Law! (Stoics, Locke, Jefferson)

Formalism: Faith & Reason define the Greatest Good

12. Religious Heteronomy: Obey God’s Commandments! (fundamentalism)
Creative Religious Theonomy: Do what love commands! (Jesus, Fletcher)
13. Rationalism: Follow the Categorical Imperative (Kant)
14. Personalism: Live by the Moral Laws (Brightman, Bertocci, DeWolf)

Student Reports on Contemporary Ethical Problems

- 15 – 19. Personal Ethics
- 20 – 23. Technology and Medical, Animal and Ecological Ethics
- 24 – 27. Social Ethics
- 28 – 30. Military and Governmental Ethics

Every student will write a critical essay for the take-home mid-term examination. Also, one topic from the attached list will be assigned to each student who will be responsible for researching the problem, writing a formal paper of 6 to 8 pages (with footnotes and bibliography), and reading the paper before the class for purposes of discussion and evaluation. (A copy may be placed on reserve in the library.) The formal paper, class reading and discussion will take the place of a conventional final exam. Evaluation of essays and oral presentations will be based on the following: (1) Evidence of study and understanding of the material assigned and discussed in class; (2) Coherence of thought and systemic presentation of arguments; and (3) Clarity of expression, including grammatical form. Semester evaluation will include the two papers, the class presentation and class attendance.

Topics for Student Reports on Contemporary Ethical Problems

PERSONAL ETHICS

- Abortion (“pro-life”)
- Abortion (“pro-choice”)
- Euthanasia (“passive”)
- Euthanasia (“active”)
- Surrogate Mothers
- Suicide
- Birth Control
- Death Control

TECHNOLOGY: MEDICAL, ANIMAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

- Environmental Pollution
- Waste Disposal
- Environmental Ethics
- Technology and Ethics
- Genetic Engineering
- Organ Transplant
- Fetal Tissue
- Animal Rights

SOCIAL ETHICS

- Human Rights
- Feminism
- Racism (Police Brutality, Ethnic Cleansing)
- War on Drugs
- Legalizing Drugs
- The AIDS crisis
- Poverty and Violence
- Prison Ethics
- Capital Punishment

MILITARY AND GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS

- Economic Ethics (capitalism & socialism)
- Political Terrorism
- Religious Fanaticism
- Pacifism and Just War Ethics
- The U.N. and the New World Order
- “Gays” in the Military
- Women in Combat