

CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL ISSUES

Religious Studies 361
#13519 M 4:00-6:45

Office Hours: MW 12:30-1:50 M 3:30-3:50
Santa Susana 418

Spring 2014
Dr. Ken Todd
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This course addresses contemporary ethical issues: How should one *be* in the world? How should one act? How do we create a society that is livable and addresses the needs of everyone in it? The first part of the course addresses religion and religious ethics: What does it mean to act ethically according to religion? The second part will address various modern theories of ethics and what constitutes ethical behavior. The third part will investigate several different ethical issues of contemporary concern. Ethics are important because our choices are important.

SLO's for RS 361. Contemporary Ethical Issues

This course emphasizes the development of skills in critical thinking through analysis of such contemporary ethical issues as abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, sexual behavior, racism, gender bias, punishment, animal rights, the environment, and the relationships between religion and morality.

1. Students will be able to articulate, orally and in writing, the diversity and distinctiveness of the moral values implicit in and the ethical arguments currently employed within various religious and secular traditions.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the influence of diverse religious and secular traditions on moral attitudes and behaviors.
3. Students will be able to develop oral and written proposals for resolving current moral dilemmas in society.
4. Students will be able to recognize and critically evaluate their own and others' assumptions and biases as they play a role in - - and sometimes distort - - their thinking.
5. Students will demonstrate oral communication skills and mindful listening through conversations in the classroom about the moral values and forms of ethical thinking of fellow students.

RS 361 is an upper division G.E. course that provides credit in the Arts and Humanities

Student Learning Outcomes for GE in Arts and Humanities

Goal: Students will understand the rich history and diversity of human knowledge, discourse and achievements of their own and other cultures as they are expressed in the arts, literatures, religions, and philosophy.

Students will:

1. Explain and reflect critically upon the human search for meaning, values, discourse and expression in one or more eras/stylistic periods or cultures;

2. Analyze, interpret, and reflect critically upon ideas of value, meaning, discourse and expression from a variety of perspectives from the arts and/or humanities;
3. Produce work/works of art that communicate to a diverse audience through a demonstrated understanding and fluency of expressive forms;
4. Demonstrate ability to engage and reflect upon their intellectual and creative development within the arts and humanities;
5. Use appropriate critical vocabulary to describe and analyze works of artistic expression, literature, philosophy, or religion and a comprehension of the historical context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged;
6. Describe and explain the historical and/or cultural context within which a body of work was created or a tradition emerged

Required Texts: Michael Sandel, Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do? Other readings will be online via Moodle.

Course Requirements:

Regular attendance at all classes and effective participation in class discussions.

Respectful behavior toward all one's classmates and instructor. **This means turning off one's cellphone upon entering the class and NO TEXTING during class.**

Careful reading of all assigned materials prior to class for the week.

Note that RS 361 is actually two classes: On the one hand, it is an ethics class; on the other hand, it is a writing class. No matter where you go or what profession you ultimately choose, people will judge you based on your ability to write; unclear writing is generally a sign of unclear thinking. This class is going to concentrate on improving your writing, as well as honing your ability to think ethically.

Grading:

Initial paper (1 page): 50 points

5 papers (2 pages): 100 points each

Pop quizzes will be 10 points each (Note that if a student misses more than 3 pop quizzes, all missed pop quizzes will become zeros)

Seminar presentations and participation, while not assigned a specific number of points, will also affect the grade

You may not submit a paper written for another class.

Grade Scale:

100-97% A+

93-96% A

92-90% A-

87-89% B+

83-86% B

80-82% B-, etc.

Class Schedule

Week 1 Jan. 20	Holiday
Week 2 Jan. 27	Intro/Course Overview/Religion and Ethics; Jewish Ethics Christian Ethics
Week 3 Feb. 3	Islamic Ethics Hindu Ethics <i>Short paper due</i>
Week 4 Feb. 10	Buddhist Ethics Chinese Ethics
Week 5 Feb. 17	“Doing the Right Thing” Sandel, ch. 1 “Gambling with Civilization” (Moodle)
Week 6 Feb. 24	“Utilitarianism” Sandel, ch. 2 “Libertarianism” Sandel, ch. 3 <i>Paper #1 due</i>
Week 7 Mar. 3	“Markets and Morals” Sandel, ch. 4 “Lead Poisoning: The Ignored Scandal” (Moodle)
Week 8 Mar. 10	“Kant” Sandel, ch. 5 “Rawls” Sandel, ch. 6 <i>Paper #2 due</i>
Week 9 Mar. 17	“Arguing Affirmative Action” Sandel, ch. 7 “How to Win the Tobacco War” (Moodle)
Week 10 Mar. 24	“Aristotle” Sandel, ch. 8 “Dilemmas of Loyalty” Sandel, ch. 9 <i>Paper #3 due</i>
Week 11 Mar. 31	Holiday
Apr. 7-13	Spring Break
Week 12 Apr. 14	“Justice and the Common Good” Sandel, ch. 10 “Are we puppets in a wired world?” (Moodle)

Week 13 Apr. 21	Movie: “Paradise Now” “Paradise Now” <i>Paper #4 due</i>
Week 14 Apr. 28	“Terror: The Hidden Source” (Moodle) “The Secret Way to War” (Moodle)
Week 15 May 5	“Rescuing Homosexual History” (Moodle) “It’s in Your Own Best Interest” (Moodle) <i>Paper #5 due</i>