

Philosophy 235: Contemporary Moral Issues

UBC Summer Term II 2009

Mon and Wed: 1:00–4:00

Buch D 316

Instructor: Joshua J Johnston

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Course website: <http://johnston.mentalpaint.net/courses>

Office: Buch D321 **Hours:** Wed 4:00 - 5:00 and by appointment

This course will explore topics of contemporary moral interest and will provide you with the philosophical tools required to make informed decisions about them. First, with the near collapse of many financial markets across the globe, there can be no doubt that we are experiencing an economic crisis. The time, then, is ripe to explore issues surrounding **economic justice**. For example, how should we handle, if at all, vast disparities of wealth? Second, as one cannot go through the day without hearing about the war on terror, it is timely to think about the interrelations between and moral implications of **war, terrorism, and torture**. Is it ever right to torture, and is there ever a just war? Finally, the protection of our own civil liberties and rights is always of moral concern, but what about **censorship** and its role in demarcating those liberties and rights? For example, should we ever censor immoral pictures?

I. Material (books available from UBC bookstore)

Weeks 1 and 2: *Economic Justice*. Stephen Nathanson. Prentice Hall 1998. (EJ)

Weeks 3 and 4: *Contemporary Moral Problems: War, Terrorism, and Torture* edited by James E White. ThomsonWadsworth. 2009. (WTT)

Weeks 5 & 6: Readings will be available from course website

II. Requirements

3 Exams	@ 25% each	75%
5 Group Exercises	@ 3% each	15%
Class Participation		10%

Exams

The point of taking the exams is to prove that you have read and understood the material. The exams will cover the previous topic. The material for the exams will be drawn from the text as well as class (including movies). They will consist of short answer questions as well as short essays questions.

Group Exercises

The point of the group exercises is to allow you the time to work together in small groups on a certain topic recently covered in class by answering one or two group exercise questions. The dates for the group exercises will be random and unannounced.

Class Participation

I expect you to ask questions and to offer your own thinking to me and others throughout the duration of the course. Further, although I will not take official attendance, I will remember those who consistently come to class.

III. Schedule

Note: You are expected to attend class having already read the material for that day.

Week 1: Economic Justice

M (July 6th): Intro material and movie, *Commanding Heights pt.1*

W (July 8) : EJ part 1 (pp. 1-40)

Week 2: Economic Justice

M (July 13): EJ part 2 (pp. 41-80)

W (July 15): EJ part 3 (pp. 81-137)

Week 3: Exam / War, Terrorism, and Torture

M (July 20): Exam and movie, *A View from a Grain of Sand*

W (July 22): WTT (pp. 1-39)

Week 4: War, Terrorism, and Torture

M (July 27): WTT (pp. 39-63)

W (July 29): WTT (pp. 66-97)

Week 5: Exam

M (August 3): No Class -- BC Day

W (August 5): Exam and movie, TBD

Week 6: Censorship, Pictures and Pornography (readings available from course website)

M (August 10): To Be Determined

W (August 12): To Be Determined

Date of last exam (material covered in weeks 5 & 6) to be announced.

Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate your educational opportunities.

Please note that cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will result in an "F" for the course. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, please check with me or the University guidelines.

Disclaimer: This syllabus may be amended at any time by the instructor.