

Applied Ethics: The Sanctity of Human Life Doctrine and its Critics,  
Course Description and Requirements  
Instructor: John Hymers

Description:

Perhaps no belief has had more influence on the history of ethics in the west than what we may call the Sanctity of Human Life Doctrine (SHLD). However, this doctrine has come under increasing scrutiny since Jeremy Bentham, and today finds itself assailed by various ethical positions. This course shall investigate both the philosophical underpinnings of this doctrine, and the pressures put upon it by utilitarianism, animal ethics, and bio-ethics. Having grounded ourselves through an historical and then topical approach to the questions concerning the dignity of human life, we will then ask: is human life special? Is it ever right to take a human life? What about war? Suicide? Medically-indicated abortion?

Material Goals:

- To gain basic familiarity with the doctrines underpinning the SHLD
- To gain basic familiarity with the doctrines challenging the SHLD

Formal Goals:

- To learn how critically to approach issues that make a claim on ultimate meaning
- To understand the relation between classical and contemporary ethical theories of personhood

Procedure:

If class size permits, each class will begin with a brief student presentation (5-10 minutes) based on a prepared question list concerning the assigned readings, drawn from the course outline. Then, through a guided discussion, the instructor will ensure the above goals are met. If class size is too great, the instructor will lead a discussion based on the aforementioned question list.

Grading:

Three papers (due throughout the semester) and a final examination. The first paper is worth 15 % of your final grade; the following two papers and the final exam are each worth 25 % of your final grade. The final 10 % is earned through class participation.

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR COURSE OUTLINE

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Course Outline  
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*Historical Philosophical Foundations*

Classical Greek Ethical Theories

Aristotle and Plato: The Life of Contemplation

Stoicism: Dignity of Human Life

Emergence of Christian Ethics

St. Augustine

Boethius

St. Thomas Aquinas

John Locke

Catholic Personalism

*Gaudium et Spes*

Richard McCormick

Louis Janssens

*Contemporary Challenges*

Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham and J. S. Mill

Joseph Fletcher

John Harris

Jonathon Glover

Animal Rights Ethics

Peter Singer

Tom Regan

James Rachel

Bio-ethics

The 'clinicalization' of ethics

Pre-implantation Diagnosis

Pre-natal Diagnosis

Predictive Genetic Medicine

Germ-line Therapy

*Contemporary Defences*

Alan Donagan

Alan Gewirth

Ronald Dworkin

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