

PHIL 220: Contemporary Moral Issues
Christian Brothers University

Course description

From the course catalog: "Contemporary Moral Issues" is "a philosophical examination of a number of significant and controversial contemporary moral problems. Topics will vary but may include abortion, capital punishment, sexual morality, animal rights, environmental ethics, freedom of speech, discrimination, and affirmative action. The treatment of these topics will develop in the context of the tradition of philosophical ethics."

This course will be taught as an introduction to philosophical ethics with a focus on salient contemporary issues. As such, we will engage with some philosophical works from the ancient world in addition to more contemporary works in both the continental and analytic traditions of philosophy in order to gain exposure to philosophical thinking and writing. All this will be in the aim of creating the conditions for philosophically rigorous attention to specific issues. The ultimate aim of the course is to help students apply what was learned about philosophically engaging with a moral problem in order to develop and articulate their own views on these critically important and deeply relevant issues.

In summary then, (1) we will begin the course with a brief introduction to the history of philosophical ethics, reading Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and Nietzsche, and then (2) we will move to an equally brief introduction to contemporary ethical theories. With this background, (3) we will spend the majority of the semester applying this theoretical work to specific contemporary moral issues, including abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, affirmative action, capital punishment, freedom of speech, drug legalization, world hunger, animal rights, environmental ethics, and body modification.