

Introduction of Moral Philosophy (Fall 2017)

Killing is wrong. The generic prohibition against killing, while seemingly univocal, is perplexing. Most people agree that taking human life is wrong, yet there are clearly cases where killing is justified. Morality demands that we not kill others, yet we generally agree that considerations of self-defense override this demand. Millions of animals are killed in the United States each year for culinary purposes, yet the lives of similarly cognitively deficient humans are seen as inviolable. While all people agree that killing infants is wrong, many believe that killing humans in the initial stages of gestation is permissible. How should we reconcile these apparently conflicting condemnations and approvals? What makes killings immoral, when they are? This course will explore a cluster of such questions, (almost) all related to issues of life and death, in the service of addressing the central question of this course: What makes killing wrong?

Readings

Part I: Philosophy, Moral Reasoning and Saving Lives

Hare – *What is life?*
Priest – *Logic: a very short introduction*
Timmons – *Moral theory primer*
Arthur – *World hunger and moral obligations*
Singer – *Famine, affluence and morality*
Hardin – *Living on a lifeboat*
Cullity – *Asking too much*

Part II: Moral Status and the Value of Life

Singer – *All animals are equal*
Cohen – *The case for the use of animals*
Carruthers – *Against the moral standing of animals*

Part III: Autonomy

John Paul II – *The tragedy of euthanasia*
Rachels – *Active and passive euthanasia*
Callahan – *When self-determination runs amok*
Brock – *Voluntary active euthanasia*
Nagel – *Death*
Dorsey – *Headaches, lives, and value*
Montaigne – *That to philosophize is to learn to die*

Part IV: Abortion

John Paul II – *The unspeakable crime of abortion*

Moller – *Abortion and moral risk*
Thomson – *A defense of abortion*
Warren – *On the moral and legal status of abortion*
Marquis – *Why abortion is immoral*

Part V: Police Brutality

Monaghan -- *The special moral obligations of law*
Brennan – *When may we kill government agents?*

Part VI: Climate Change

Singer – *One atmosphere*
Posner & Weisbach – *Climate change justice*, chapter V