

**Topics in Ethics and Political Philosophy**  
**Professor Peter Unger**

**Spring Semester, 2012**

Classes will be conducted mainly in the form of exploratory discussions: The professor will begin each session's discussion, trying to present ideas that will stimulate others to join in the proceedings. Mostly, course grades will be based on written work. But, class contribution will also be a determinant or, in place of that, discussion in the professor's office sessions.

Week 1 *Living High and Letting Die* (or LHL D), Peter Unger, Oxford University Press, 1996,  
Chapter 1

Week 2 LHL D, Chapter 2

Week 3 LHL D Chapter 3

Week 4 LHL D, Chapter 6, sections 6 - 8 (pages 146-152) and section 10 (pages 156-57).  
"The Demands of Beneficence" Liam Murphy, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 22,  
No. 4. (Autumn, 1993), pp. 267-292. JSTOR

Week 5 "Our Duties to Animals and the Poor" Colin McGinn COURSEPACK  
"Reply to McGinn" Peter Singer COURSEPACK  
"Rescue" Liam Murphy COURSEPACK

Week 6 "Should the Numbers Count?" John Taurek, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 6,  
No. 4. (Summer, 1977), pp. 293-316. JSTOR  
"Innumerate Ethics" Derek Parfit, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 4.  
(Summer, 1978), pp. 285-301. JSTOR

Week 7 "The Trolley Problem" Judith Thomson, *The Yale Law Journal*, Vol. 94, No. 6 (April,  
1985): 1395-1415. JSTOR  
LHL D Chapter 4

Week 8 "The Survival Lottery" John Harris, *Philosophy*, Vol. 50, No. 191 (January, 1975),  
pages 81-87. JSTOR  
LHL D Chapter 5

Week 9 LHL D Chapter 6  
"Killing the Innocent in Self-Defense," Michael Otsuka, *Philosophy and Public  
Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Winter 1994), pages 74-94. JSTOR

Week 10 For discussion of a topic new to the course read:  
"A Defense of Abortion," Judith Thomson, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1,  
No. 1 (Autumn, 1971) pages 47-66. JSTOR

For furthering understanding of LHL D's first 6 chapters, read:

Book Symposium on LHL D

"Précis of Living High and Letting Die" Peter Unger, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 59, No. 1. (Mar., 1999), pp. 173-175. JSTOR

"Sacrificing for the Good of Strangers-Repeatedly" Brad Hooker, *PPR* 177-181. JSTOR

"Living High and Letting Die" Peter Singer, *PPR* 183-187. JSTOR

"Take and Give" Thomas W. Pogge, *PPR* 189-193. JSTOR

"Comments on Living High and Letting Die" Fred Feldman, *PPR* 195-201. JSTOR

"Replies" Peter Unger, *PPR* 203-216. JSTOR

Two Reviews of LHL D

"Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence" F. M. Kamm, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 2. (Apr., 1999), pp. 300-305. JSTOR

"Illusory Innocence?" David Lewis COURSEPACK

Week 11 In the First meeting of Week 11, submit a 3-4 page paper, typed double space, on what *you* think are, for typically well-off people, the costs of leading a morally decent life. Present the strongest argument you can for your clearly stated view.

For discussion this week, read:

"Overpopulation and the Quality of Life," Derek Parfit from Peter Singer (ed.) *Applied Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 145-164.

Download from: <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball2568/parfit/bibliography.htm>

And also read this interdisciplinary material:

"What Can Economists Learn from Happiness Research?" Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer, *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. XL, (June 2002), pp. 401- 415.

Download from NYU Libraries e-journals

Week 12 "Equality and Priority" Derek Parfit, *Ratio*, vol. 10, no. 3 (December, 1997), pp. 202-221. Download from NYU Libraries e-journals *or* from:

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball2568/parfit/bibliography.htm>

Also, complete the paper by Frey and Stutzer, reading pages 416-431.

Week 13 For discussion this week read:

"Different Attitudes to Time," Derek Parfit, from his *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, 1984. COURSEPACK

Week 14 In the First meeting of this Week, submit a 3-4 page paper, typed double space, on a topic both *covered in the course* and *very different from* the topic of your first paper.

In class sessions this week, we shall review the semester's material.

The professor will TRY to return your graded papers in the last session of the course.