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Office Hours: TR, 2:00-3:00pm, or by appointment

Contemporary Moral Issues: PHIL 2306-10
8:00-9:20am, TR, CHSS 00206

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is a study of major moral issues in contemporary society. In particular, the course explores questions about abortion, euthanasia, censorship, capital punishment, distributive justice, racism, gender discrimination, and other issues that confront today's society. 3.0 Credit hours.

GOALS: The goals of this course are the following:

- 1.) To develop within students a deeper understanding of moral problems in contemporary society.
- 2.) To develop in students an ability to intelligently communicate their thoughts, values, and norms in ways that enhance their competency as citizens.

OBJECTIVES: In this course you will work towards:

1. Identifying competing notions of morality and justice and developing your own philosophical positions related to contemporary moral disputes.
2. Reading and analyzing primary and secondary philosophical works.
3. Clearly articulating your philosophical ruminations in both written and oral form.
4. Presenting your ideas in dialogue amongst your peers so as to positively contribute to democratic governance in the public sphere.

WRITING INTENSIVE:

It is important for you to know that Contemporary Moral Issues is a “W” course, which means that at least 50% percent of your course grade will derive from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. Writing in this course is one of the tools I will use to help you learn course material. Some writing activities will require you to draft and revise your work, with or without my feedback. Others may not receive a grade but are designed to assist you in critical reflection of the course material. You should approach writing in this course as a tool to use as part of your learning as well as a tool I will use to assess your level of learning.

ASSESSMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Selected readings and reflection questions will be assigned to assess your ability to identify competing claims of morality and justice and to develop your own thoughts about what morality and justice requires related to specific contemporary moral problems. These reflection questions will be posted on BlackBoard and you will be required to hand them in there in either document or pdf format. Reflection papers should be at least one page long (approximately 300 words), double-spaced, and utilize 12 point Times New Roman font. Before uploading papers on

blackboard make sure to save them in the following manner: last name, first name, reflection paper number. Accordingly, Jane Doe would label her first reflection paper: Doe, Jane, Reflection Paper 1. Papers saved in any other way will not be accepted.

2. You will be assigned three argumentative papers where you will be required to develop a philosophical position about a contemporary moral issue. Your argument can be derived from prior reflection papers or you can develop a new argument on your own. Also, you can turn in a draft to me two weeks before the paper is due in order to gain feedback (drafts after the two week before the due date will not be reviewed. You can use whatever notes or resources you deem necessary to successfully complete these papers. **HOWEVER, DO NOT PLAGIARIZE.** Punishment for plagiarism is spelled out in Academic Policy Statement 810213:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/728eec25-f780-4dcf-932c-03d68cade002.pdf>

3. You will be given pop quizzes to assess your comprehension of the reading assignments throughout the course of the semester. These quizzes will be given in class and/or assigned on BlackBoard. If you miss a quiz because of an unexcused absence you will not be allowed to make it up and will receive a grade of zero.

4. You will be required to participate in in-class brainstorming sessions and think-pair-share activities. The exemplary student will write down whatever comes to her or his mind during brainstorming and think-pair-share sessions. You will be selected by lot to share your thoughts with your peers. Easy participation points will be given for brainstorming and think-pair-share activities.

5. You will be required to contribute to in-class dialogue. This means you must participate! The exemplary student will bring her reflections about the reading and out of class assignments to bear in class discussions. Easy participation points will be given for in class dialogue.

GRADING: Your grade for this course will be based on the following categories: test scores, reflection papers, pop quizzes, and class participation. The categories will be weighted as follows:

3 Argumentative Paper: 40%

3 Reflection Papers: 40%

Pop Quizzes: 10%

Class Participation: 10%

Grading Scale

A (100-90), B (89.9-80), C (79.9-70) D (69.9-60), F (59.9 and lower)

MAKE UPS AND LATE SUBMISSIONS:

For late papers, I will deduct 10% of the possible points (e.g., 10 points for regular term papers and 20 points for the final) from your paper grade for each 1-hour period, or part thereof, from the time that the paper was due until I receive the paper. Because these assignments will be given

weeks in advance, no excuses for late submissions will be accepted. Exams submitted in any unreadable format will be treated as if no paper was submitted. If you submit an exam in an unapproved format prior to the deadline, but I do not receive the appropriate electronic format until after the deadline, I will deduct points according to this late policy up until the acceptable format is provided. The only exceptions to the policy outlined above relate to university policies and/or state laws concerning religious holy days and other mandated exceptions.

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance records will NOT be used in determining your grade. However, class attendance is strongly encouraged as all students are responsible for any material covered or assignments given in class even if it does not appear in the texts or on the website. It will be quite difficult to do well in this class without attending regularly. On many occasions, class discussion will provide essential details for understanding the concepts in the course.

STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS POLICY:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

Academic Policy Statement 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/0953c7d0-7c04-4b29-a3fc-3bf0738e87d8.pdf>

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

In accordance with the University’s Academic Policy Statement 810213, found in the link below, the following statement applies to all students in my classes:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials. It is

essential that students use proper attribution when utilizing any sources. Plagiarism will be referred to appropriate university authorities for disciplinary action. All papers will be submitted electronically through [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com), which will be used to check for plagiarism.

<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/728eec25-f780-4dcf-932c-03d68cade002.pdf>

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS-DISABILITY SERVICES:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and email disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/7ff819c3-39f3-491d-b688-db5a330ced92.pdf>

For more information please visit: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

COURSE CONTENT DISCLAIMER:

In this course, students may be required to read text or view materials that they may consider offensive. The ideas expressed in any given text do not necessarily reflect the views of the instructor, the Psychology and Philosophy Department, the Writing Program, or Sam Houston State University. Course materials are selected for their historical and/or cultural relevance, or as an example of stylistic and/or rhetorical strategies and techniques. They are meant to be examined in the context of intellectual inquiry of the sort encountered at the university level.

WRITING CENTER:

I encourage you to take advantage of the writing services offered at the Writing Center. The Sam Houston Academic Success Center for Reading and Writing serves the students, staff, and faculty of SHSU. Their goal is to help people become better writers and so develop more confidence in their writing abilities.

ASC tutors provide one-on-one and small group instruction for reading and writing. They help students on assignments ranging from English composition essays to science lab reports, résumés, scholarship and job application letters, even M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations.

Also, ASC tutors help students learn preparatory prewriting, revising, and editing skills by working with them on the writing tasks they bring in, see:

<https://www.shsu.edu/centers/academic-success-center/writing>

Reading and Test Schedule: (Text: *The Moral of the Story: An Introduction to Ethics*) You are expected to read the following pages from your text before you come to class. The dates provided underneath indicate deadlines on which the material must be known prior to your attendance. You will be quizzed and tested on this material, so it is important that you keep up with this schedule.

Introduction: Reading of the Course Syllabus

August 24: *Introduction and Reading of the Course Syllabus*

Chapter Thirteen: Abortion, Euthanasia, Media Ethics, Business Ethics, Just War Theory, Animal Rights, Environmental Ethics, and the Death Penalty.

August 29: (648-664) *Euthanasia as a Right to Choose, and Media Ethics*

August 31: (664-673) *Media Ethics cont. and Business Ethics.*

September 5: (673-687) *Just War Theory and Animal Rights*

September 7: (687-713) *Environmental Ethics and the Death Penalty*

Chapter Three: Ethical Relativism.

September 12: (115-126) *Dealing with Moral Differences*, **(First Reflection Paper Due!)**

September 14: (126-149) *Problems with Ethical Relativism*

September 19: (149-152) *Anthropology and the Abnormal Excerpt*, (152-1554) *Is Ethics Just a Matter of Social Convention*, (164-166) *Avatar Narrative*

Chapter Four: You or Me?

September 21: (167-187) *Psychological Egoism*

September 26: (187-205) *Ethical Egoism and Emotionalism*

September 28: (205-209) *The Republic Excerpt*, (215-218) *Frans De Waal Video*

October 3: **(First Argumentative Paper Due!)**

Chapter Five: Utilitarianism

October 5: (218-236) *Jeremy Bentham and the Hedonic Calculus* (253-255) *Of the Principle of Utility Excerpt*.

October 10: (236-253) *John Stuart Mill, Qualitative Pleasure, and The Harm Principle*

October 12: (255-268) *Utilitarianism Excerpt*, (263-266) *Extreme Measures Excerpt*

Chapter Six: Kant's Deontology

October 17: (272-285) *Kant's Deontology and The Categorical Imperative*

October 19: (285-295) *Rational Beings and Beings Who are Things*

October 24: (295-296) *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals and The Metaphysics of Morals Excerpts*, (306-307) *Abandon Ship! Narrative* **(Second Reflection Paper Due!)**

Chapter Seven: Personhood, Rights, and Justice

October 26: (312-334) *History of the Concept Human, Personhood, Stem Cell Research, Cloning, Genetic Engineering*

October 31: (334-342) *Ronald Dworkin, Negative Rights, and Positive Rights*

November 2: (342-357) *John Rawls and Distributive Justice*

November 7: (361-363) *Justice and Fairness Excerpt*, (364-365) *A Letter from Birmingham Jail Excerpt*

November 9: **(Second Argumentative Paper Due!)**

Chapter Eight: Virtue Ethics from Tribal Philosophy to Socrates and Plato

November 14: (383-404) *Virtue Ethics, Tribal Ethics, Socrates, and Plato*

November 16: (404-410) *The Tripartite Soul, the Forms, and Plato's Influence on Christianity*

November 21: (410-413) *The Republic Excerpt*, (417-420), *What is a Good Life? Excerpt*, (426-429) *The Truman Show Excerpt* **(Third Reflection Paper Due!)**

Thanksgiving Break (No Class: November 22-26)

Chapter Nine: Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

November 28: (432-441) *Empirical Knowledge, Aristotle the Scientist, and Teleology*

November 30: (441-454) *The Golden Mean, Happiness, Aristotle's Influence on Aquinas, and General Objections to Greek Virtue Theory*, (454-460) *Nicomachean Ethics Excerpts*

Tuesday December 5: Third Argumentative Paper Due (8:00-10:00am)