

Spring 2018 Syllabus (Jan 17 thru May 10)

**Contemporary Moral Issues, PHIL 2306 05** (21296), 3 Credit Hrs.

Meets in CHSS Rm. C090 TR 12:30PM – 1:50 PM

Professor: Alan C. Clune, Ph.D.

Office: CHSS Rm. 349

Office Hours: TuTh 11AM-12:00PM OR By Appointment.

Psychology and Philosophy Dept. Phone: 294-1174

Office Phone: 294-4327, email: clunea@shsu.edu

**1. CATALOGUE COURSE DESCRIPTION:** A study of major moral issues in contemporary society. Includes topics such as recreational drug use, abortion, euthanasia, animals and ethics, capital punishment, and other issues that confront today's society. Credit 3.

**2. CLASS DESCRIPTION:** PHIL 2306, Contemporary Moral Issues, is a course in which students analyze current moral dilemmas through the lenses of various moral theories and moral principles. How to explain and justify moral decisions in response to the issues, in particular when those issues involve law and public policy, is the primary normative question driving this course. This course devotes time to the question of whether moral values are objective or whether they are culturally determined, thereby looking at differences in moral beliefs across various cultures.

**3. COURSE OBJECTIVES/STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

Objective 1: This course explores ideas that foster intellectual creation in order to understand the human condition. Students will be asked to discuss and/or apply moral theories to contemporary moral dilemmas. These assignments fulfill this component objective, as students will think through the relevance of moral values to humanity.

Objective 2: Courses in this category of the Core Curriculum focus on how ideas, values, beliefs, and other aspects of culture express and affect human experience. Students will be introduced to the different moral perspectives of different cultures on a variety of moral issues (such as euthanasia and animal ethics). Students will be encouraged to discuss what are the implications of the pluralistic variety of moral beliefs for the treatment of particular issues.

Objective 3: Students will be introduced to the various ways in which moral issues affect and are affected by law and public policy and as a result have a variety of social implications. Students will be encouraged to demonstrate awareness of these implications by exploring items in the news that pose moral issues.

**4. SKILL OBJECTIVES:**

Critical thinking: Students will be introduced to basic reasoning strategies often used to evaluate and construct philosophical arguments. Discussion of ethical issues, prior to

lectures on these issues, will help foster a student's ability to think critically about what they have read before detailed instruction.

**Communication skills:** Class discussions address the oral aspect of communication skills. Relevant arguments will be presented in a standard logical form to highlight their premises and the inferences that are supposed to lead to their conclusions. The visual presentation clarifies their logical form.

**Personal responsibility:** Students will be encouraged to come to their own positions on the issues discussed which will require students to think through the ethical implications of their moral beliefs and actions.

**Social responsibility:** Students will be asked to evaluate the morality of practices that have political and social dimensions (such as, for example, abortion and euthanasia). Students will be introduced to various cultural perspectives on different moral issues for example, on abortion and euthanasia, and will be asked to discuss the differences in these perspectives in the context of class discussion.

## **5. DESCRIPTION OF APPROACH**

The course will have a good amount of lecturing. Also, Class discussion will be encouraged. Students can ask for clarification, comment on the material and generate questions for discussion.

## **6. SOME GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

### **Fundamental Objectives**

- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.
- Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories.

### **Specific Objectives**

- Learn basic theories of ethics.
- Learn to apply these theories to moral problems that arise in society.
- Learn the difference between having an opinion and having an opinion that one can make a case in support of.

## **7. REQUIREMENTS**

- There will be five exams. The fifth exam is the final exam and is cumulative (The lowest exam of these 5 exams is dropped, which means that ultimately there will be four exams worth 25% each).
- Exams will be Scantron only. Bring a Rectangular Scantron—accommodating 100 questions, 50 on each side—to each exam. Crumpled Scantrons that don't make it through the machine receive a zero. The types of questions will be some combination of multiple choice and true and false.

NOTE1: Anyone coming **late to an exam** will not be allowed to take the exam if anyone has already finished taking the exam and has left the exam room. Don't be late for exams.

NOTE 2: If I see a cell phone during exam, the person who is attached to it will receive a zero. I will take their exam materials away immediately.

## **8. NO MAKE-UP EXAMS**

There are NO make-up exams. Students who miss an exam will get a zero for that exam. I do drop the lowest grade from the five exams. The final exam, if it is the lowest, will be the one that is dropped. Otherwise, one of the other lowest exams will be dropped.

## **9. EXTRA CREDIT**

There will be NO EXTRA CREDIT offered for this course.

## **10. SPECIFIC COURSE INFORMATION/POLICIES**

**IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE IN THIS SYLLABUS,**

**MAKE SURE TO READ THIS SECTION!!**

**ABSENCES:** Attendance is mandatory. In accordance with University regulations, I pass an attendance sheet every period. I will, at times, also request other written material from you during class-time to verify attendance. These sheets are the only basis I use for determining attendance. If you do not complete both of them, then you are counted as absent. So complete them. It is against SHSU's policy on academic dishonesty for one student to complete one for another student.

Every day make sure you have an 8 ½ by 11 sheet of paper with you (with no fringes). You may not need to use it, but always have it.

You are allowed only 5 unexcused absences w/o penalty. This means you do not get extra absences beyond the 5 allowed, even with an excuse. (**Except for absences due to religious holidays**). For each absence after 5, your course grade will be lowered by one FULL letter grade. These 5 absences are meant for you to use for emergency situations. Using them for non-emergency situations can be to your disadvantage because actual emergency situations do not earn you extra days beyond the five.

If you decide to stop attending class, please remember to drop the course or you will receive an F. **NOTE: *The Q-drop dates have changed. April 6th will be the last day that students will be able to Q drop courses for this term.***

LATENESS or EARLY DEPARTURES: If you are late, you will be considered absent for that day. If you leave early, you will be marked absent for that day unless you speak to me before class.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: Anyone caught cheating on exams will receive an F *for the course and the case will be referred to the dean of students.*

CLASSROOM CONDUCT: Everyone in the classroom is expected to be respectful of others. Heated discussions are often excited and good, but the expression of disagreements should not stray too far from a constructive purpose. The professor reserves the right to ask a student to leave that class period. The following devices must be turned off before class begins: cell phones, pagers, music players (such as iPods). Students are prohibited from using tobacco products, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, using the internet, talking at inappropriate times, or engaging in any other form of distraction such as playing games on computers or cell phones, passing notes, sleeping, etc... The professor may ask a student to leave that class period if he/she is doing any of these things or is disruptive.

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS: Students will be asked to complete a course IDEA evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

LAPTOPS AND SIMILAR DEVICES: If you choose to use such a device, it can be for note taking only, and you must sit in one of the first two rows in the front of the class. Anyone caught using their laptop for anything else will be asked to leave and *will be counted absent that day.*

## **11. ADMINISTRATION POLICIES**

STUDENT SYLLABUS GUIDELINES: Go to the following website for fuller information on syllabus guidelines:

<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines* Link above. See link below for additional information:

[/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf](http://dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf)

NOTICE TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY: 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 visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the:

**Lee Drain Annex (next to the Farrington Building), E-mail: [disability@shsu.edu](mailto:disability@shsu.edu), web address: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/disability/index.html>**

For additional information:

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

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.* See below link for details:

<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

**CLASSROOM CONDUCT:** Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process. University code of conduct can be found here:

<https://netreg.shsu.edu/mirror/codeofconduct.html>

**VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:** *Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.*

This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.

**REGISTERING FOR CLASS:** I cannot add anyone to the course, for any reason whatsoever, after the deadline for adding. This policy holds even if you were dropped due to financial aid reasons.

**Q-DROPS:** For Q-Drop Policy see the Academic Calendar for the current semester accessible from the SHSU homepage. There is now a limit of 5 Q-Drops for each student's undergraduate career at SHSU. Q-Drops from other institutions and Q-Drops that occurred before Fall 2004 are not counted toward the limit of 5. Students who have reached their limit can petition the Dean to for another Q-Drop. If refused, they must stay registered for the course.

Again, Last day to Q-Drop: **Friday, April 6th**

**12. GRADING SCALE** (Your Course grade SO FAR can be found on the blackboard under “Weighted Total.” Before all grades are in, the weighted total merely tells you what grade you would get if you continue doing the same quality work as you have been doing. When all grades are in, it represents your course grade, as long as nothing needs to be deducted for absences.

90-100	A
80-89.99	B
70-79.99	C
60-69.99	D
0-59.99	F

NOTE: I do *NOT* round up. Please don’t ask me to.

**13. REQUIRED TEXT:** Lewis Vaughn’s *Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues*, 4th edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2013).

Here are the ISBNs for the book:

ISBN-13: 978-0393265415 OR ISBN-10: 0393265412

**14. TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE:**

Readings are assigned as we go which gives flexibility for discussion. I may make changes in this outline as time allows or disallows.

A. Ethical Theories

1. Introduction to Consequentialist Theories, pgs. 78-95
  2. John Stuart Mill: Mill’s Ethical theory Called ‘Utilitarianism,’ 96-101
3. Introduction to Non-Consequentialist (Or ‘Deontological’) Theories, 102-114
  4. St. Thomas Aquinas: The Natural Law, 125-135
  5. Immanuel Kant: Kant’s Deontological Ethical Theory and The Categorical Imperative, p. 116-124
6. John Rawls: “On Justice,” 688-694.

**Test 1 (Tuesday, Feb 13)**

B. Terrorism and Torture

1. Introductory Material, 595-605
2. Alan M Dershowitz: A Defense of Torture, “The Case for Torturing the Ticking Bomb Terrorist,” 669-678
3. David Luban: An Argument Against Torture, “Liberalism, Torture and the Ticking Bomb,” (TBA)

C. Drug Legalization

1. Introductory Materials (TBA)

2. Thomas Szasz: The Ethics of Addiction (TBA)
3. James Q. Wilson: Against Legalization of Drugs (TBA)

## **Test 2 (Tuesday, March 6)**

### **D. The Moral Status of Animals**

1. Introductory Material, pgs. 544-552
2. Peter Carruthers: Contractarianism and Animals (Reading not in Book, more info later)
3. Peter Singer: A Utilitarian Case for Animal Liberation, "All Animals are Equal", 553-562
4. Tom Regan: A Kantianesque Case for Animal Rights, "The Case for Animal Rights", p. 563-569

### **E. Abortion**

1. Introduction to Issue/Background, pgs. 163-174
  - a. Statistics on Abortion in the U.S., 164
  - b. U.S. Supreme Court Roe vs. Wade, 166 (Also see Powerpoint)
  - c. Scripture and Abortion, 168
2. Don Marquis: A Criticism of Abortion, "Why Abortion is Immoral," 194-205.
3. Judith Jarvis Thomson: A Moderate Defense of Abortion, "A Defense of Abortion", 175-184.
4. Mary Anne Warren: A Stronger Defense of Abortion, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion", 185-193

## **Test 3 (Tuesday, April 10)**

### **F. Capital Punishment**

1. Introductory Material, pgs. 353-362
2. U.S. Supreme Court Decision on Capital Punishment, Gregg vs. Georgia, (In Powerpoint Only).
3. Immanuel Kant: A Retributive Theory of Punishment, (In Powerpoint Only).
4. Ernest van Den Haag: A Defense of Capital Punishment, "The Ultimate Punishment...", 363-367.
5. Jeffrey Reiman: A Criticism of Capital Punishment, "Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty", 368-373

### **G. Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide**

1. Introductory Material, pgs. 292-301
2. James Rachels: A Criticism of the Distinction between Active and Passive Euthanasia, "Active and Passive Euthanasia", 302-305
3. Bonnie Steinbock: A Criticism of Rachels' Article, "The Intentional Termination of Life", 344-349.

### **H. Sexuality Morality and Marriage**

1. Introductory Material, pgs. 451-455

2. Jonathan Rauch: A Defense of Gay Marriage, “On Marriage,” 456-461
3. Maggie Gallagher: A Criticism of Gay Marriage, “What is Marriage for?” 469-473

**Test 4 (Thursday, May 3rd, On Our Last Class day), Then there IS a final exam also:**

**Final Exam, Cumulative (Final Exam Week: Tuesday, May 8th, 1PM to 3PM)**