

Spring 2018 Syllabus (Jan 17 – May 10)

**Contemporary Moral Issues, PHIL 2306W06** (21386), 3 Credit Hours

Meets in CHSS Bldg. room 220 TuTh 9:30-10:50AM

Professor: Alan C. Clune, Ph.D.

Office: CHSS Rm. 349

Office Hours: TR 11AM-12:00PM, Or By Appointment

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### **1. CATALOGUE COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A study of major moral issues in contemporary society. Includes topics such as recreational drugs, abortion, euthanasia, animals and ethics, capital punishment, and other issues that confront today's society. Credit 3.

### **2. CLASS DESCRIPTION**

Philosophy 2306W: 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 with notes. Also, there will be an emphasis on class discussion and active learning whereby students are expected to generate questions and offer critical evaluations of the various positions that are explored. Such in-class activity is of prime importance to developing critical thinking skills about moral issues. This is because such skills require practice thinking and speaking about the issues.

## **6. 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**

Tests I and II (15% each): Essay

Test III (15%): Multiple Choice

Final Exam (15%): Not Cumulative, Multiple Choice, bring Scantron.

Announced Quizzes: (10% of grade): Quizzes will be true and false questions from the readings. One quiz is dropped (keep up with the reading and this is an easy 10 points)

Position Papers (30% of Grade): Two papers, approximately 1,200 words each. This cannot be, even in part, a paper you wrote for another course. Papers need to be turned in through **TURNITIN**, using the dropboxes placed on blackboard and as a hardcopy on due date. **TURNITIN** checks for plagiarism. Come see me if you are having trouble writing your paper. Don't resort to relying on others' work.

Adopt a position on an issue/topic we have already discussed, and make a case for your position (Must be word processed). These papers are expected to integrate the readings and course materials. **Papers that do not specifically address in a substantial way the course readings and course materials will receive a very low grade.** Grammar and spelling count. This is not a research paper, so citations, if any, should be minimal and come from our readings only. If you have to mention a statistic (a number, percentage, etc., it needs to be cited and come from our book.)

**NO OUTSIDE SOURCES ARE TO BE USED IN ANY WAY FOR THIS PAPER. You can use only assigned readings, powerpoints, and your notes from this class. No Internet or other outside sources. Using outside sources will earn you a zero.**

In these papers, the student might want to answer the following types of questions: 1) what issue impressed you so far? 2) What position do you take on that issue? 3) What case can you make in support of this position? 4) What is one argument someone else might be able to make against your position? And 5) How might you respond?

These papers are graded both on the student's demonstration that he/she understands the material being covered (Comprehension) and on the student's ability to make a case for the opinions and positions that he/she takes on issues. The papers are not graded on the student's opinion but on the student's ability to make a rational case for his/her opinions to the broadest audience possible.

See my "Tips for writing paper" under course documents on blackboard.

**Paper #1 Due Thursday March 22 (Turn in *both* as a Hardcopy and Online Through "Turnitin")**

**Paper #2 Due Thursday April 26<sup>th</sup> (Turn in *both* as a Hardcopy and Online Through "Turnitin")**

**If you take your paper to the writing center for help, I will automatically add 5 points out of 100 to that paper's grade (half a letter grade). Schedule ahead. The writing center needs you to make an appointment most of the time.**

**8. EXTRA CREDIT:** *No Extra Credit besides for taking your papers to writing center.*

## **9. WRITING ENHANCED COURSE**

This is a "W" course, which means that at least 50 percent of your course grade will be derived from writing activities designed to help you master course objectives. In order to

facilitate this, I will be giving essay exams and assigning two papers. I will be giving feedback on paper #1 that should be considered carefully and incorporated into writing paper #2. I will be giving feedback on the essay exams which should also be considered carefully when preparing for and taking further exams. The point of the feedback is to help improve your performance on future work. Although your exams will be reviewed with you in class, they will not be returned to you. So students are encouraged to visit my office hours to review and discuss their exam feedback.

## 10. SPECIFIC COURSE POLICIES

**ABSENCES:** Attendance is mandatory. In accordance with University regulations, I take attendance every class day.

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.

Missing exams are not counted as absences. But see “Make-Ups” section below.

**Cell Phones:** Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during any class time. Each time I see someone with a cell phone, he/she will be **counted as absent**, an absence which will count as one of their five allowed absences.

**Laptops/Tablets:** No Laptops/Tablets can be used during class. Notes need to be taken by hand. We will not need book during class.

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. Friday, April 6th, will be the last day that students will be able to Q drop courses for this term.**

**LATENESS or EARLY DEPARTURES:** For those who are habitually late, I reserve the right to start taking ¼ point off his or her final grade for each time late. If you come to class late, you need to tell me on that day, right after class, or you will be counted as absent.

**MAKE-UPS:** If one is necessary, it is likely to be longer and more difficult than the regular test. You must have a good reason for missing a test; having another test the same day, for example, does not count as a good reason. If you do miss a test, see me as soon as possible. Your excuse must be written out and appropriately documented. **ANY EXCUSE THAT CANNOT BE VERIFIED WILL RESULT IN A GRADE OF ZERO FOR THAT EXAM.** If you do have a valid excuse, then we should make the arrangements for you to take a make-up **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating on exams will receive an F *for the course*.

**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. **NO USE OF THE INTERNET DURING CLASS.**

**UNCOLLECTED ASSIGNMENTS:** I hold onto uncollected graded assignments until the first day of the next semester. If you have not collected them by then, they will be thrown away.

## **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.

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
<60	F

NOTE: I do *NOT* round up. Please don't ask.

**13. 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.

**Tests** cover only to the point we have reached in powerpoint presentations on readings.

##### 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," (Reading Not in Book: More Info Late

##### 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)**

**Paper #1 Due Thursday March 22 (Turn in *both* as a Hardcopy and Online Through "Turnitin")**

##### 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

### **Paper #2 Due Thursday April 26<sup>th</sup> (Turn in *both* as a Hardcopy and Online Through "Turnitin")**

#### 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

<b>Final Exam, Non-Cumulative Multiple Choice (Final Exam Week: Thursday, May 10, 9:30AM-11:30AM)</b>
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