

PHIL 2306: Contemporary Moral Issues (Spring, 2018)

Instructor: Dr. Ian McDaniel

CLASS MEETING TIME/PLACE:

11:00am – 12:20pm TR 223 CHSS

OFFICE HOURS:

09:30am – 10:50am TR, and by appointment.

Office: 360 CHSS building

Skype Office Hours: By appointment

Skype Address: [ian.k.mcdaniel](https://www.skype.com/people/ian.k.mcdaniel)

Students are encouraged to make liberal use of these hours to meet with the instructor to seek greater clarity on the topics covered throughout the course, peripheral topics of philosophical interest or information regarding the philosophy program in general.

EMAIL:

ikm001@shsu.edu (Please allow up to 24 hours for a response.)

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will consider two overlapping aspects of ethical philosophy. The first aspect is the study and understanding of ethical theories. This course will provide an introduction and exploration of some of the more prominent ethical theories in philosophy. The second aspect is the application of theory to practical issues. We will consider how each of the various theories discussed during the course can be applied to three contentious topics in modern society: abortion, the death penalty, and the duty to render aid to suffering individuals.

It should be understood that agreement with any of the authors, the instructor, or guest speakers (availability permitting), is neither required nor is it expected. These are issues about which reasonable and rational people disagree and some dissent is taken as a given. What is expected of each student is that s/he will read the assigned readings and demonstrate his/her understanding of the material covered and complete work consistent with standards for academic quality. These expectations, which are requirements for the course, will be measured by means of two (2) examinations, a series of five (5) writing assignments, and regular in-class quizzes.

The course format will be primarily lecture in nature, but will seek to integrate classroom discussions with regular lectures when possible. Students should come to class each day prepared to take an ACTIVE role in discussions/lectures.

SHSU CORE CURRICULUM REQUIREMENT:

This course satisfies three (3) hours of the Sam Houston State University core curriculum in Component Area IV: Language, Philosophy, and Culture.

“W” – COURSE STATEMENT:

This 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 your instructor will use to help you learn course material. Some writing activities will require you to draft and revise your work, with or without instructor 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 your instructor will use to assess your level of learning. During the completion of this course you will have the opportunity to submit a series of writing assignments designed to familiarize you with different elements of the writing process. Each of these assignments is designed to assist you in developing your writing ability and apply what you have learned to completion of a proper term paper for the course. You will receive feedback concerning your writing on each of the first four assignments. You may also submit the corresponding element of your term paper at the same time for feedback without receiving a grade on the term paper element.

SATISFYING THE “W” COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course satisfies the “W” course requirements through the completion of the series of five (5) writing assignments, which will count for 50% of the overall course grade. Through the completion of these assignments, students will have the opportunity to receive feedback on their writing from the instructor and to incorporate that feedback into their future writing as the course progresses.

ELECTRONIC DATA STORAGE POLICY:

The university provides all students with data storage and backup on the university servers. Students are expected to maintain backup files of their work. A student whose computer “crashes” and thus “loses his/her work” as a result of failing to maintain adequate backup files will not be considered to have a valid excuse for an extension if the only reason for the extension is that the student did not take the time to ensure that his/her materials were preserved on the university servers.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT:

During this course you will no doubt encounter viewpoints that you do not agree with, this is to be expected. When this happens, everyone will be expected to maintain an appropriate level of respect for others and conduct oneself in a civil manner. You are free to disagree and express your disagreement, but name-calling, the use of profanity towards others, and other expressions of unrepressed malice toward others will not be tolerated.

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is required of all students enrolled in the course and so will be taken each day prior to class. As much of the material for the examinations will likely arise from and be expounded upon during lecture and discussion, a student that regularly fails to attend class will likely see a corresponding failure to attain her desired grade for the relevant assignment(s) and as such, the course.

VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

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.

University policy 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:

</dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf>

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

CLASSROOM ACCOMADATIONS:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. 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 e-mail 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>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

The university rules and regulations regarding academic integrity will be in effect throughout the course and all students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with these policies. While discussion about the material in and out of class with other students and the instructor is encouraged, all work must reflect the student's own understanding of the material. All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain 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. Any violation of the academic integrity policy will not be tolerated and may result in a failing grade for the assignment, failure of the course, suspension and/or expulsion from the university depending upon the severity of the violation. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/dean-of-students/index.html>

GRADE SCALE:

This course will use the following grade scale for assigning final course grades:

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| A | 90 and above |
| B | 80 to less than 90 |
| C | 70 to less than 80 |
| D | 60 to less than 70 |
| F | less than 60 |

EVALUATION AND GRADING:

Each student will be evaluated based upon the following criteria:

Examinations (40%)

Each student will be required to complete two (2) examinations: a mid-term examination and a final examination. The mid-term examination will comprise 15% of the student's overall grade. The final examination will comprise 25% of the student's overall grade. The final examination will be comprehensive. A study guide for each exam will be provided (via blackboard) at least one (1) week prior to the date of the exam. Examinations will generally be multiple choice in format, though the professor reserves the right to include alternately formatted questions if deemed appropriate by the instructor for achieving course goals.

Reading Comprehension/Attendance Quizzes (10%)

Periodically the instructor will begin class with a short quiz designed to assess whether or not students have read the material for the day and/or have been keeping abreast of the material under discussion (from lectures, speakers, etc). These quizzes will [generally] take no more than 5 minutes and will not be announced in advance (also known as a "pop" quiz). Students are therefore encouraged to be on time and to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading(s) and material from the previous period's lecture, etc. The instructor reserves the right to administer such quizzes at the end of class instead of at the beginning of class if the instructor deems this in the best interest of achieving course goals. A minimum of twelve (12) quizzes will be administered throughout the semester. Students will be allowed to drop two (2) quizzes from their final score for any reason. Since regular class attendance is required of all students and students are allowed to drop two quizzes, no "make-up" quizzes will be given. Students who arrive to class during an in-progress quiz will be allowed to take the quiz, but will only have as much time as the amount remaining to those students who were on time to class. If you show up 4 minutes late to class and a quiz is in progress for which 5 minutes has been allotted, you will have 1 minute to complete the quiz. For this reason, it is best that each student plan to be on time (or early) to class each day.

Writing Assignments (50%)

Each student will be required to complete a series of five (5) writing assignments, the culmination of which will be a term paper on a topic assigned by the instructor. Each of the first four (4) writing assignments will address a particular element of analytical writing. Students will then be required to combine what they have learned from the first four writing assignments into a term paper on an assigned topic. Students are encouraged to work on the term paper as they work on the other writing assignments and to seek feedback on their term paper from the instructor throughout the course.

Writing Assignment 1 (5%): Students will be assigned a set of paper topic ideas germane to the course. Each student will then craft a proper introductory paragraph for each of the paper topic ideas with emphasis on stating a clear thesis for each.

Writing Assignment 2 (5%): Students will be assigned a particular paper, chosen by the instructor, germane to the course material, but not included on the course syllabus. Each student must offer a clear discussion which identifies and explains in detail the particular arguments employed by the author of the chosen paper. Students must also clearly identify the thesis of the chosen paper in their submission.

Writing Assignment 3 (10%): Students will be assigned a set of arguments by the instructor on a topic germane to the course, but not specifically covered during lecture or readings. The instructor will also provide the students with a selection of principles and/or theories that have been discussed during the course prior to that time. Each student must offer a clear discussion of the relevant objections to the assigned arguments based on the provided principles/theories.

Writing Assignment 4 (10%): Students will be assigned an argument and a series of relevant objections to the argument by the instructor which is germane to the course, but not otherwise covered during lecture or readings. The instructor will also provide the students with a selection of principles and/or theories that have been discussed during the course prior to that time. Each student must offer a clear discussion of how the original author of the assigned argument (or a likeminded supporter of the original author) would respond to the assigned objections using the provided theories/principles.

Writing Assignment 5 - Term Paper (20%): Students will be assigned a short article by the instructor. Each student must offer a clear discussion in support of a proper thesis for how the characters in the article *should* behave. This will require utilizing various theories and principles drawn from the course material to support their chosen thesis, recognize plausible objections to their arguments, and responding to those objections accordingly. Students are encouraged to seek guidance and feedback from the instructor on each element of the term paper as the course progresses.

TEXTS:

The following text is required for this course:

The Elements of Moral Philosophy, James Rachels, 8th Edition, edited by Stuart Rachels (MP)

Additional readings will be made available by the instructor either via blackboard or as searchable .pdf files that can be downloaded at any campus computer terminal.

Optional Texts:

The following texts are not required, though students may find them useful in their considerations of some material covered in this course:

J.S. Mill *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2 (Google)

J.C.C. Smart & Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism For & Against*, Cambridge Press 1973.

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals*, Sections I and II (Google)

The following online guide to writing a philosophy paper is strongly recommended by the instructor for all students to utilize when writing for the course in general, and for the term paper in particular:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE:

On the next page is the planned schedule of readings and assignment due dates. Students should be aware that changes in the exact dates of some reading assignments may occur. If significant deviations occur in the reading schedule, a revised course schedule will be issued by the instructor.

A student who misses an assignment because s/he was not informed of a change of date in the assignment due date will not be considered to have an acceptable excuse if the only reason for missing the exam was a failure to keep informed of prior announcements concerning schedule changes.

It is recommended that each student have read the assigned reading material for each week prior to the Tuesday class meeting.

| Week # | Dates | CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPIC | READING ASSIGNMENT |
|---------|-------------|--|---|
| Week 1 | 1/18 | Course Introduction & Syllabus Overview What is Moral Philosophy? | |
| Week 2 | 1/23 & 1/25 | Introduction to Moral Considerations Ethical Subjectivism | MP: Ch 1 MP: Ch 3 |
| Week 3 | 1/30 & 2/1 | Philosophical Writing: Introduction & Thesis Statement Cultural Relativism | MP: Ch 2 |
| Week 4 | 2/6 & 2/8 | Harman & Moral Relativism Singer & Obligation to Aid Friday 2/9: Writing Assignment 1 due | Harman: <i>Moral Relativism</i> Singer: <i>Famine, Affluence & Morality</i> |
| Week 5 | 2/13 & 2/15 | Religion & Ethics: Divine Command Theory Philosophical Writing: Identifying Arguments | MP: Ch 4 |
| Week 6 | 2/20 & 2/22 | Introducing the Abortion Debate Abortion with Personhood? Friday 2/23: Writing Assignment 2 due | Thomson: <i>A Defense of Abortion</i> |
| Week 7 | 2/27 & 3/1 | Abortion without Personhood? | Marquis: <i>The Immorality of Abortion</i> |
| Week 8 | 3/6 & 3/8 | Addressing Abortion without "Personhood Issue" Thursday, 3/8: Mid-term Exam | Markowitz: <i>Abortion and Feminism</i> |
| Week 9 | 3/12 – 3/16 | <i>Spring Break, No Class</i> | |
| Week 10 | 3/20 & 3/22 | Philosophical Writing: Presenting Objections Utilitarianism | MP: Ch 8 |
| Week 11 | 3/27 & 3/29 | Williams: A "New" Critique of Utilitarianism Friday 3/30: Writing Assignment 3 due | SEP Article: <i>Williams Against Utilitarianism</i> |
| Week 12 | 4/3 & 4/5 | Utilitarianism & the Death Penalty Philosophical Writing: Responding to Objections | Van den Haag: <i>Deterrence and Uncertainty</i> Reiman: <i>Civilization, Safety and Deterrence</i> |
| Week 13 | 4/10 & 4/12 | Kant's Deontology Friday 4/13: Writing Assignment 4 due | MP: Ch 10 & Ch 9 |
| Week 14 | 4/17 & 4/19 | Kant and the Inquiring Murderer Is morality <i>all</i> that matters? | Kant: <i>On the Supposed Right to Lie</i> Wolf: <i>Moral Saints</i> |
| Week 15 | 5/1 & 5/3 | Ethical Egoism Social Contract Theory Friday 5/4: Writing Assignment 5 (Term Paper) due | Ch: 5 Ch: 6 |
| Week 16 | 5/7 – 5/10 | Final Exam Week Final Exam: Thursday, May 10, 12pm – 2pm | |