

PHL 263W(06): Contemporary Moral Issues

ABIV 302 WE 6:00-8:50

Fall 2007 SHSU

Neisser

Office: AB4 403

Hours: MW 3:00-4:30 & by appointment

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This course is a critical engagement with some major moral issues in contemporary society. Topics include abortion, euthanasia, human rights, capital punishment, affirmative action, war, and the environment. The objective is to help students arrive at an informed and critical understanding of the arguments regarding these issues, and to acquire general skills in moral reasoning which will be useful throughout life. The methods of instruction will include lecture, reading difficult primary sources, discussion, and rigorous testing.

Text:

Applied Ethics: A Multicultural Approach (4th Edition), Edited by May, Collins-Chobanian, & Wong

There will also be several in-class handouts during the semester.

Grading:

Exams: **64%** overall. There will be **four** exams. **Each** exam will consist of two parts: (1) Multiple choice questions worth **8%** of the overall course grade (8x4 = 32% total), and (2) An essay worth **8%** of the overall course grade (8x4 = 32% total).

Policy on missed exams: There will be **one and only one** opportunity to take any exams you miss: during the final exam period for this class. If you have a *documented* excuse for missing an exam, you may make it up then. If you have no properly documented excuse for missing the test, you may not make-up the test.

Analytic Reading Notes: **30%** overall. Beginning with the reading assignments for 9/5 (but excluding the readings for 10/31) there are 29 readings in this course. Submitting a completed *Analytic Reading Notes* writing assignment online to the Blackboard site before the class meeting for which each reading is assigned is worth **1%** of the overall grade. If you complete all of the analytic reading notes on time, you will earn 30% of the overall grade (I will give everyone 1% at the start). Another way to put it would be to say that for **each** of these short writing assignments that you do *not* complete on time, you will **lose 1%** overall. Analytic Reading Notes will be graded on a check / fail basis. Incomplete, late, or otherwise unsatisfactory submissions will not be given credit. The *Analyzer* template for the structured reading notes is available on the course Blackboard site under 'Assignments.' We will go over this more in class as the semester goes on.

Participation and preparation: **6%** Students are expected to come to class prepared. Obviously, the first requirement for participation is showing up for class. Absences will result in a reduced participation score. Beyond this, participation and preparation includes having read the assignments and being ready to discuss them. To earn participation credit, during classtime you must actively engage the material, the instructor, and your classmates.

Attendance: In accordance with university policy, attendance will be taken at every class. NOTE: If you decide to drop the course, you must inform the registrar. If you simply stop coming to class, you will not be automatically dropped from the role. Unless you drop the course, you will end up receiving an F.

Grade scale: 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, 59 or below = F

Schedule:

8/22: Introduction: What is morality? Cultural Relativism vs. Multicultural Ethics

8/29: Theories: 1) Kantian ethics, 2) Utilitarian ethics, 3) Rights & obligations

Read: O'Neill, 'A simplified account of Kant's ethics' pp.45-50
Mill, 'Utilitarianism' pp.36-44.
'United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights' pp.80-84

9/5: Hunger and poverty

Read: Singer, 'Famine, affluence, and morality' pp.254-262
Narveson, 'Feeding the hungry' pp.263-270
Filice, 'On the obligation to keep informed about distant atrocities' pp.271-28

9/12: Animals

Read: Kant, 'Why we have no obligations to animals' Handout
Singer, 'All animals are equal' Handout
Cohen, 'In defense of Speciesism' Handout

9/19: **Exam One**

Also: Euthanasia One

Read: Rachels, 'Active and Passive Euthanasia' pp.575-579
Steinbock, 'The intentional termination of life' pp.580-586

9/26: Euthanasia Two

Read: Potts, 'Objections to the institutionalization of euthanasia' pp.587-591
Battin, 'Euthanasia: The way we do it, the way they do it' pp.592-607
Becker, 'Buddhist views of suicide and euthanasia' pp.642-652

10/3: Capital punishment

Read: Van den Haag, 'In defense of the death penalty' Handout
Reiman, 'Against the Death Penalty' Handout

10/10: **Exam Two**

Also: Abortion One

Read: Noonan, 'An almost absolute value in history' pp.510-515
Warren, 'On the moral and legal status of abortion' pp.516-524

10/17: Abortion Two

Read: Marquis, 'Why abortion is immoral' pp.525-531
English, 'Abortion and the concept of the person' Handout

10/24: War

Read: Lackey, 'Just War Theory' pp.298-306
Cook, 'Ethical Issues in Counterterrorism Warfare' Handout
Meggle, 'Is this [Kosovo] war good?' pp.318-327

10/31: **Exam Three**

Also: Theories: 1) Natural Law, 2) Virtue Ethics

Read: Aquinas, 'Ethics and natural law' Handout
Rachels, 'The ethics of virtue' Handout

11/7: Homosexuality and same-sex marriage

Read: Leiser, 'Is homosexuality unnatural?' Handout
Bolte, 'Do wedding dresses come in lavender?' pp.399-412
Jordan, 'Is it wrong to discriminate on the basis of homosexuality?' pp.413-422

11/14: Cloning and genetic enhancement

Read: Kass, 'Preventing *Brave New World*' Handout
Pence, 'Will cloning harm people?' Handout
Sandel, 'The case against perfection' Handout

12/28: The Environment

Read: Rolston, 'Challenges in environmental ethics' Handout
Baxter, 'A 'good' environment' pp.186-190
Hill, 'Ideals of human excellence and preserving the natural environment' Handout

12/5: **Exam Four**

Policies regarding academic dishonesty, classroom behavior, visitors in the classroom, absences for religious holidays, and students with disabilities:

(1) ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

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. See University Academic Policy Statement 810213. **Electronic and online resources including turnitin.com may be used in this course to detect academic dishonesty. Any and all student work is subject to these and other detection systems.**

(2) CLASSROOM RULES OF CONDUCT:

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students therefore must refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. **This means:** (1) Do not surf the web during class. (2) Cellular phones, pagers, and music players must be turned off and earphones removed before class begins. (3) Do not make offensive remarks, read the newspapers talk at inappropriate times, use tobacco, or engage in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom will result in a directive to leave class. In accordance with university policy, students who are especially disruptive also may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action.

(3) VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted in 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 he/she will be allowed to remain.

(4) STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS:

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 religious holy days as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code...." 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 notify the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

(5) 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 are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. 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 the student has a disability that may affect adversely their work in this class, then he or she needs to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how they can best be helped. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center. There will be no retroactive accommodations.