

PHL 263(01): Contemporary Moral Issues

Spring 2008

Neisser

MWF 10-10:50 SHB 128

Office: ABIV 403

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Hours: MW 3:15-4:45 & by appointment

Phone: x4-3779

This course is a critical engagement with the public debates over some major moral issues. Topics include abortion, euthanasia, human rights, capital punishment, affirmative action, war, and the environment. The methods of instruction will include lecture, reading difficult primary sources, discussion, and rigorous testing.

Course objectives: (1) Students will display an informed and critical understanding of the arguments regarding the issues covered, and (2) Students will display general skills in moral reasoning which will be useful in other contexts and throughout life.

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: There will be **eight** tests in all: **seven unit tests** and an **optional final**. Your overall grade will be the **average of your best six test scores**. So, each test is worth 16.67% of the overall grade.

Make-up policy: There will be **one and only one** opportunity to make-up 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.

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:

1/16: Introduction: On conscientious moral reasoning

1/18: Relativism, moral reasoning, and multicultural ethics

Read: May, et.al. 'Introduction' pp.1-3
Sumner, 'Cultural relativism' Handout

1/21: MLK Day. No Class

1/23: Kantian Ethics primer

Read: O'Neill, 'A simplified account of Kant's ethics' pp.45-50

1/25: Utilitarianism primer

Read: Mill, 'Utilitarianism' pp.36-44.

1/28: Kantian vs Utilitarian justifications for human rights

Read: 'United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights' pp.80-84

1/30: **Exam One**

2/1: World hunger and the obligation to help people

Read: Singer, 'Famine, affluence, and morality' pp.254-262

2/4: World hunger and the right to be fed

Read: Narveson, 'Feeding the hungry' pp.263-270
Filice, 'On the obligation to keep informed about distant atrocities' pp.271-78

2/6: Animals and persons

Read: Kant, 'Why we have no obligations to animals' Handout

2/8: Animals and equality

Read: Singer, 'All animals are equal' Handout

2/11: **Exam Two**

2/13: Euthanasia, active and passive

Read: Rachels, 'Active and Passive Euthanasia' pp.575-579

2/15: Euthanasia and the Doctrine of Double Effect

Read: Steinbock, 'The intentional termination of life' pp.580-586

2/18: Euthanasia as an institutionalized medical practice

Read: Potts, 'Objections to the institutionalization of euthanasia' pp.587-591

2/20: Comparing end-of-life medical practices in the U.S.A. and Western Europe

Read: Battin, 'Euthanasia: The way we do it, the way they do it' pp.592-607

2/22: End-of-life attitudes in Japanese history and culture

Read: Becker, 'Buddhist views of suicide and euthanasia' pp.642-652

2/25: **Exam Three**

2/27: Abortion, persons, and the genetic criterion

Read: Noonan, 'An almost absolute value in history' pp.510-515

2/29: Abortion, persons, and the core traits criterion

Read: Warren, 'On the moral and legal status of abortion' pp.516-524

3/3: Abortion and a future like ours

Read: Marquis, 'Why abortion is immoral' pp.525-531

3/5: Abortion and killing in self-defense

Read: English, 'Abortion and the concept of the person' Handout

3/7: Abortion and family values in Japan

Read: LaFleur, 'Contestation and Consensus' pp.560-567

3/10-3/14: Spring Break

3/17: Review

3/19: **Exam Four**

3/21: Good Friday. No Class

3/24: Capital punishment and retributive justice

Read: Van den Haag, 'In defense of the death penalty' Handout

3/26: Capital punishment, justice, and deterrence

Read: Reiman, 'Against the death penalty' Handout

3/28: War: When and how to fight

Read: Lackey, 'Just War Theory' pp.298-306

3/31: Terrorism and Just War Theory

Read: Cook, 'Ethical Issues in Counterterrorism Warfare' Handout

4/2: Humanitarian war

Read: Meggle, 'Is this [Kosovo] war good?' pp.318-327

4/4: **Exam Five**

4/7: Virtue Ethics and Natural Law Theory primers

Read: Hursthouse, 'On Virtue Ethics' pp. 51-58

4/9: Natural Law Theory Primer

Read: Aquinas, 'Ethics and natural law' Handout

4/11: Homosexuality and Natural Law

Read: Leiser, 'Is homosexuality unnatural?' Handout

4/14: Same-sex marriage

Read: Bolte, 'Do wedding dresses come in lavender?' pp.399-412

4/16: Same-sex marriage

Read: Jordan, 'Is it wrong to discriminate on the basis of homosexuality?' pp.413-422

4/18: **Exam Six**

4/21: Cloning and genetic enhancement

Read: Kass, 'Preventing *Brave New World*' Handout

4/23: Cloning and genetic enhancement

Read: Pence, 'Will cloning harm people?' Handout

4/25: Cloning and genetic enhancement

Read: Sandel, 'The case against perfection' Handout

4/28: The environment and intrinsic value

Read: Rolston, 'Challenges in environmental ethics' Handout

4/30: Prudential Anthropocentrism

Read: Baxter, 'A "good" environment' pp.186-190

5/1: The environment and Virtue Ethics

Read: Hill, 'Ideals of human excellence and preserving the natural environment' Handout

5/5: **Exam Seven**

5/7: Big Finish

An **Optional Cumulative Final** (exam eight) will be also offered to replace your second-lowest test score (since your lowest will be dropped altogether).

Policies:

(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.

(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 newspaper, 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.