

# Philosophy 2367: Contemporary Social and Moral Problems

## Required Text:

There is **no required text**. Readings will be posted on Carmen.

## Course Description

Philosophy is the art of thinking critically about the world. Many times this can take the form of academic discussions with little direct relevance for how we live our lives. This course will not be like that. We will be looking at issues that affect the way we live and vote in this country (or any other). A lot of the issues we will be examining are difficult to avoid; so most of us will approach the conversation with definite opinions. Nevertheless, we will try to look at the reasons behind our views—often they will prove deficient or inadequate. Sometimes a person hears an argument or claim that sounds compelling, and they come to claim it as their own definitive position. But it is much harder to reason through a complex issue, from basic assumptions to a conclusion. Most of us avoid doing this—we do not in general have the time or energy to evaluate all of our beliefs. In this course, we will devote time and energy to evaluating our core moral beliefs through the lens of contemporary moral issues. Insofar as it is possible, we will try to be open to reasoned arguments—both to make our own beliefs more stable and, perhaps, to provide a basis for revising them. Moreover, we will focus on communicating our reasons clearly and persuasively both in our discussions and in our writing.

## Classroom Expectations

Everyone is expected to come to class. Students are required to have done the readings, and they should be prepared to discuss them. There will on occasion be passionate disagreement—it is vital that we remain courteous to each other and to each other's point of view. It is possible to criticize arguments without showing disrespect for the people who endorse them—that is what we will strive to do. Electronic devices are permitted for note-taking purposes only.

## General Education Information:

This course satisfies the following GE's:

GE Diversity: Social Diversity in the US - The goal of courses in this category is to foster an understanding of the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States.

GE Writing and Communication: level 2 - The goal of this category is to develop skills in writing, reading, critical thinking, and oral expression.

## Assignments and Evaluation

### Participation (10%)

Philosophy is an activity. Like many activities, you'll only get as much out of doing philosophy as you put into it. To encourage engagement, 10% of your grade will depend on your being an active, appropriate, and interesting contributor to the class. I understand that speaking up in class is difficult for some students. To that end, I will do my best to create an atmosphere of open and easy discussion. In addition, a discussion board will be

activated on Carmen in order for further discussion outside of class. Comments on the discussion board will count towards participation.

#### Reading Quizzes (10%)

Prior to each class in which there is a reading, beginning the second week, there will be a short (3-5 T/F or multiple choice question) quiz posted to Carmen. The quiz will be available to take the 24 hours before each class begins. These quizzes are meant as a way to keep you accountable for reading.

#### Take home essays (30%)

The course will be broken into 5 Units. Students are to write **a total of six unit essays** (1-2 pages typed, double-spaced) throughout the term. Students may choose to write **up to two essays per unit** (thereby allowing students to load up at the beginning or end of the course, spread out the essays, or skip a unit they would prefer not to write on). More information concerning the layout of the essays will be distributed in class.

#### Papers (50%)

Students will write two papers over the course of the semester, a midterm paper of 3-4 pages (20%) and a final paper of 5-6 pages (30%). I will provide possible paper topics at least three weeks prior to the due dates of the papers. Students are permitted to write a paper based on another topic provided they meet with me to discuss their topic.

Drafts of both papers will be due a week prior to the final due date in order to receive comments both from classmates and the professor. Drafts and student comments will be worth 5% and 10% of the paper grade for the midterm and final papers respectively.

#### Late and Make-Up Work

No make-ups or extensions will be granted for any assignment unless you provide either (1) written (and approved) notice of absence beforehand, or (2) written documentation of an emergency situation afterward.

#### Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. No form of academic misconduct will be tolerated. I'll report all suspected instances to the Committee on Academic Misconduct (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct.

#### Disability Statement

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services (ODS) will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The ODS is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; Phone: 614-292-3307.

### **Schedule of Topics**

Note: This is an ambitious list. Readings/topics may be cut/added/alterd due to class interest or time constraints. Also note that the schedule is broken down by units and semester weeks.

Readings for particular classes will be assigned 1-2 classes in advance.

#### **Unit 1:**

#### **Weeks 1-3: Moral Theory**

1. Is morality relative or objective?
  - a. Cultural Relativism
  - b. Divine Command Theory
  - c. Non-theistic bases for objective morality
2. Normative Theory
  - a. Utilitarianism
  - b. Kantianism

- Weeks 7-9: Reproductive Rights**
1. Abortion
  2. Paternal rights

- Unit 4:**  
**Weeks 10-11: Paternalism**
1. Prostitution
  2. Euthanasia

- Unit 2:**  
**Weeks 4-6: Vegetarianism**
1. Animal rights
  2. Famine relief

- Unit 5:**  
**Weeks 12-14: Social Justice**
1. Death Penalty
  2. Torture
  3. Capital Punishment

**Unit 3:**

**Bonus Final Topic:**  
 The Drug War

\*Time permitting, topics that might be added: licensing parents, immigration, and gun control

**Important Dates**

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|-----------------|---|
| Wednesday 2/4:  | <b>Unit 1 essays due</b>                                |
| Friday 2/20:    | Class cancelled (there will be an assignment)           |
| Wednesday 2/24: | <b>Unit 2 essays due</b>                                |
| Friday 3/6:     | <b>Midterm paper draft due</b> (in class)               |
| Wednesday 3/9:  | Paper comments returned                                 |
| Friday 3/13:    | <b>Midterm paper final draft due</b> (submit to Carmen) |
| 3/18 – 3/20:    | Spring Break – no class                                 |
| Wednesday 3/25: | <b>Unit 3 essays due</b>                                |
| Wednesday 4/8:  | <b>Unit 4 essays due</b>                                |
| Wednesday 4/22: | <b>Final paper draft due</b> (in class)                 |
| Friday 4/24:    | Last day of class                                       |
|                 | Paper comments returned                                 |
| Monday 4/27:    | <b>Unit 5 essays due</b> (submit to Carmen)             |
| Wednesday 4/29: | <b>Final paper due</b> (submit to Carmen)               |