Syllabus - Fall 2014
Contemporary Moral Issues
PHIL 3003: MW, 2:30-3:45 pm (AH E257)

Professor:

Prof. Steven D. Weiss, Dept. of History, Anthropology and Philosophy
Office hours: TR, 10:30 - 11:30 am; MW, 4:00 -5:30 pm; and by appointment.
Office phone: 706-667-4461; dept. phone: 706-737-1709; fax: 706-729-2177
E-mail: sweiss@gru.edu

Required Texts:


Weston, A Practical Companion to Ethics, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Recommended Readings and Websites:

For information on the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (IEB):
http://ethics.iit.edu/eb/index.html
Course Description & Goals:

The course explores a wide range of contemporary ethical issues and teaches students how to develop, defend and critically evaluate philosophical arguments, both pro and con, relating to these issues. Students will learn how to anticipate objections and counterarguments to their position and respond effectively to these challenges. The course further reviews basic ethical theories and concepts and helps students identify both good argument strategies and fallacious modes of reasoning. Students will also learn how to distinguish between empirical, ethical and legal queries, as well as how to identify the ethical principles and values at stake in their case studies. The course is structured around lecture/discussion as well as team work and in class-debates. Some of the ethical issues open for consideration in the course may include the ethics of warfare, euthanasia, abortion, the ethical treatment of animals, cloning, the death penalty, surrogate motherhood, racial profiling, torture, and the use of performance-enhancement drugs.

Course Requirements:

1. One 5-6 page papers (typed, double-spaced, one inch margins) at 100 points. The paper is due in class on the date listed below; a letter
grade will be subtracted for each day the paper is turned in late. The paper will represent a fully expanded ethical analysis of a particular case study with the presentation of an effective argument on how the case should be resolved, taking into consideration anticipated objections and counter-arguments.

2. Two in class exams: midterm and final (100 points each) comprised of short answer and mini-essay questions (some of which may be case-related).

3. In-class ethics debate (100 points); the grade will team-based. Students will have ample opportunity to practice debating before their in-class evaluation.

Course Policies:

1. Attendance is required and roll will be taken; those who arrive late or leave early may be marked absent. More than 4 unexcused absences will result in withdrawal from the course, per university policy. An excused absence must be documented (e.g., doctor’s note) and approved by the professor. An excused absence from an exam will be granted only under extreme circumstances e.g., a medical emergency (work-related conflicts are not excused). All excused absences must be documented with corroborating evidence and will only be permitted after review by the professor; whenever possible notify the professor beforehand about your situation.
2. Avoid late arrivals or early departures as they disrupt the class. Except for emergencies, do not leave the class early unless you have talked to the professor beforehand. Should you arrive late you must sign the class roll at the end of period; failure to sign the attendance sheet counts as an absence. Excessive late arrivals and early departures will result in withdrawal from the course. Students are also required to check their university e-mail account prior to each class time in case the instructor needs to update students on assignments, class activities or class cancellation.

3. Success in this course requires regular attendance and careful, timely reading of all assignments and good note taking. Hard and intelligent work will be rewarded with good grades and an understanding of ideas that can be used and enjoyed throughout your life. Mediocre work will be rewarded with half-knowledge and poor grades. Earning an “A” requires consistently excellent work; this is distinctly possible, but not easy.

4. Academic integrity is more important than receiving a good grade in the course. You will be glad to know that I don’t tolerate cheating of any kind. Please review the Academic Conduct Policy (3.1.4) available at http://policy.gru.edu/3-1-4-academic-conduct-policy/

5. Debate and discussion are encouraged in class as we critically examine various philosophical issues and ideas. No one has the right, however, to monopolize the discussion and each of us is expected to respond thoughtfully and respectfully to those who express ideas and points of view
different from ours. Consistently thoughtful and constructive participation in class will be taken into consideration when determining the final course grade. Similarly, behavior that disrupts constructive discussion or other learning may adversely affect your grade or result in withdrawal from the course.

6. Proper classroom decorum is the standard in higher education. According to university policy, eating and drinking are prohibited in the classroom; sleeping or resting your head on your desk is not allowed; turn off cell phones and pagers before coming to class (ringing cell phones constitute disruptive behavior); no looking at cell phones or texting in class. Laptop use in class is restricted to course-related work. Failure to comply with these rules is disruptive and can result in withdrawal from the course.

7. Students with disabilities who qualify for services will receive the accommodations for which they are legally entitled. It is the responsibility of the student to register with the Office of Testing and Disability Services and follow their procedures for obtaining assistance. For more information: http://policy.gru.edu/4-1-1-accommodating-students-with-learning-disabilities/

Grading:

Grades will be calculated according to the following scales:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-90%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>89-80%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>79-70%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>400-360 points</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>359-320 points</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>319-280 points</td>
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Course Objectives:

The assignments require careful reading and re-reading. The first step in tackling a reading is to develop an understanding of the philosophical problems, questions and issues at stake. The next step is to determine the philosopher's considered response. What assertions or claims does he make? How does he argue for or defend his view? What are the premises and conclusion of his arguments? The final step is to evaluate critically the philosopher's assertions. Are the premises true or plausible and are they sufficient to justify the conclusion? Has the philosopher overlooked alternative ways of thinking about the problem or question under discussion? As you think about all of this, you should consider your own beliefs and ideas and ask how you would modify or defend them in light of our discussion. Students are therefore expected to

1. Gain a better understanding of the complexity of a range of contemporary ethical issues engaging philosophers.

2. Learn how to recognize, analyze, defend and critically evaluate philosophical positions, beliefs and arguments in a way that is logically consistent and rationally sound.

3. Learn basic valid and invalid argument forms within deductive
logic; learn how to recognize common fallacies in informal logic and to identify the ethically relevant considerations of a case and avoid ethical irrelevancies.

4. Present beliefs and ideas in a way that indicates both awareness and thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, especially those with opposing beliefs.

5. Develop good reading and writing skills, i.e., learn how to read a text with attention to nuance and detail; and to write clearly and cogently.

6. Develop one’s own philosophical beliefs vis-à-vis contemporary ethical issues by defending and testing them against competing points of view.

Course Schedule:

Aug. 18: Introduction; pre-course assessment.

Aug. 27: Elements of Moral Philosophy, ch. 6, “The Idea of a Social

Sept. 1: Labor day – no class

Sept. 10: A Practical Companion to Ethics, ch. 5, pp. 69-84; in class review of case studies.

Sept. 17: Team work: preparing case studies.
Sept. 24: Team work: preparing case studies.

Oct. 1: In class debates
Oct. 6: In class midterm.
Oct. 8: In class debates.


Oct. 15: In class debates.


Oct. 22: In-class debates.

Oct 27: In-class debates.

Oct 29: In-class debates.

Nov. 3: In-class debates

Nov. 5: In-class debates.


Nov. 12: In-class debates.

Nov. 17: In-class debates.

Nov. 19: In-class movie.

Nov. 24: Paper due in class; in-class movie.

Nov. 26: Thanksgiving break - no class.
Dec. 1: In-class debates.
Dec 3: Course evaluation and post-course assessment.

Final exam schedule: Weds, Dec. 10, 3:30-5:30