**Contemporary Moral Issues**

**Philosophy 130 S –– Fall 2019**

Instructor: Felipe G. A. Moreira

Room: Ashe Administration 735A

Time: Tuesday and Thursday 3:30 – 4:45PM

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Office Hours: After class from 4:45PM to 5:45PM at the Philosophy Library, and by appointment

Website: Blackboard (Let me know as soon as possible if you cannot access it).

**Class Description**

A contemporary moral issue satisfies three criteria: (i) it belongs to the present, (ii) it puts morality into question and (iii) it gives rise to at least one moral, ethical and/or political dispute. A deviant is a person who causes a contemporary moral issue. How ought we to react to deviants? This question drives this class and we start by spelling out Donald Trump’s likely answer to it. The class is then divided into three parts. The first approaches two death-related contemporary moral issues: suicide and death penalty. The second part deals with two birth-related contemporary moral issues: abortion and artificial selection. The third part is the main focus of the class and is about five life-related contemporary moral issues: communism, racism, drug use, pornography and terrorism. The primary readings of the class are non-academic writings by the following deviants: Donald Trump, Kurt Cobain, Charles Manson, Anaïs Nin, Hitler, Che Guevara, Martin Luther King, Malcom X, Allen Ginsberg, Linda Lovelace, Oriana Small, Osama Bin Laden, George W. Bush, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. The secondary readings of the class are philosophical texts by distinguished authors.

**Class Goals**

To teach how to read non-philosophical texts in a philosophical way.

To introduce some of the main ethical theories.

To show how such theories can be applied to specific contemporary moral issues.

To present several answers to the question that drives this class: how ought we to react to deviants?

To provide philosophical tools so that students can write persuasive papers on ethics.

**Schedule**

P.S1: Come to class having read the text for that date.

P.S2: I reserve the right to make changes to topics and dates of reading assignments.

**Introduction**

August 20: *Outline of the Class*

Primary Reading (P): Syllabus

August 22 and 27: *Donald Trump’s Worldview*

P: Donald Trump’s *The Art of the Deal* (chapter 2)

1. **Death**

August 29 and September 3: *Suicide*

P: Kurt Cobain’s “Suicide Note”

Secondary Reading (S): Ronald Munson’s “Utilitarianism”

For Fun (F): Nirvana’s songs (especially, “Dumb”) and to Hole’s “Doll Parts”

September 5 and 10: *Death Penalty*

P: Charles Manson’s “Court Transcript, November 19, 1970”

S: Ronald Munson’s “Kant’s Ethics”

F: Charles Manson’s songs (especially, “Look at your Game, Girl”)

1. **Birth**

September 12 and 17: *Abortion*

P: Anaïs Nin’s “Mirages: The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1939–1947” (excerpt)

S: Ronald Munson’s “Theories Without Principles”

F: Philip Kaufman’s movie “Henry and June”

September 19 and 24: *Artificial Selection*

P: Hitler’s *My Struggle* (excerpt; “Chapter XI: Race and People”)

S: John Harris’s “Is gene therapy a form of eugenics?”

F: Oliver Hirschbiegel’s movie “Downfall”

1. **Life**

September 26 and October 1: *Communism*

P: Che Guevara’s “Cuba: Historical Exception or Vanguard in the Anticolonial Struggle?”

S: Vaughn’s “Marx”

F: Walter Salles’s movie “The Motorcycle Diaries”

October 3, 8 and 10: *Racism*

P-1: Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream speech ––August 28th, 1963”

P-2: Malcolm X’s “Oxford Union Debate –– December 3rd, 1964”

S-1: Cornel West’s “Moral Fire –– Martin Luther King Jr.”

S-2: Cornel West’s “Revolutionary Fire –– Malcolm X”

F-1: Spike Lee’s movie “Malcolm X”

F-2: Aaron McGruder’s TV show “The Boondocks” (especially, S01E09, “Return of the King”) and Ava Du Vernay’s movie “Selma”

October 15 and 22: *Drug Use*

P: Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”

S: Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?”

F: Allen Ginsberg’s reading “Howl” and Tiesto’s song “Everything”

*October 17-20: Fall Recess*

October 24, 29 and 31: *Pornography*

P-1: Linda Lovelace’s *Ordeal* (excerpt)

P-2: Oriana Small’s *Girlvert: A Porno Memoir* (excerpt)

S-1: Catherine MacKinnon’s “Pornography as Trafficking”

S-2: S: Gayle Rubin’s “Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong: An Analysis of Anti-pornography politics”

F-1: Rob Epstein’s and Jeffrey Friedman’s movie “Lovelace”

F-2: Jill Bauer’s and Ronna Gradus’s documentary “Hot Girls Wanted”

November 5: *Sexual Harassment*

P: Way’s “I went on a date with Aziz Ansari. It turned into the worst night of my life”

November 7, 12, and 14: *External* *Terrorism*

P-1: Osama Bin Laden’s “To the Americans”

P-2: George W. Bush’s “September 20th, 2001 Speech”

F: Michael Moore’s documentary “FahrenHype 9/11

November 19 and 21: *Internal* *Terrorism*

P-1: Eric Harris’s “Diaries”

P-2: Dylan Klebold’s “Diaries”

S-1: Peter Langman’s “Influences on the Ideology of Eric Harris”

S-2: Ralph Larkin’s “The Columbine Legacy: Rampage Shootings as Political Acts”

F-1: Michael Moore’s documentary “Bowling for Columbine”

F-2: Gus Van Sant’s “Elephant”

*Thanksgiving: November 23-December 1st*

**Conclusion**

December 3: Review

**Requirements**

**Participation Points:** **20%**. Students should give valuable contribution to class discussions. Extra-credit will be given for those who constantly do so. Students who often miss classes and/or disrespect the rules stated under class behavior should expect to miss participation points.

**Take Home Assignments Points: 50 %**. With the exception of the first class, students should submit hard copies of their take-home assignments at the beginning of the class. **Take home assignments must be typed.** These assignments will ask you to answer a question about the required readings. They are worthy between 1% to 2% each, and by the end of the semester students should have written approximately 2000 words for these assignments. **Do not send me your take-home assignment by e-mail. If you cannot come to class, ask a friend to submit your assignment in your behalf. A schedule with all the take-home assignments can be downloaded on Blackboard**.

**Final Paper: 30 %**. The final paper must address any contemporary moral issue and have **at least 1500 words**. **If you want to earn writing credits for this class, you should also submit a draft.** The draft must have **at least 500 words**. If you do not need writing credits, I still recommend you to submit a draft. I will comment on your drafts and you are expected to revise them in accordance with my comments before submitting your final paper. The draft and the final paper should be submitted in Blackboard. **The due dates are:**

**Draft: November 14th**

**Final Paper: December 5th**

**Mental Disorder**

In case you have a mental disorder (e.g., depression, anxiety, etc), you should let me know **in private** **by the end of the first week of class and provide proper medical documentation that attests to your condition**. Depending on your case, an alternative evaluation might be given. **This opportunity will not be given to students who have a mental disorder, but only approach me late in the semester (e.g., in April or even only after the end of classes).**

**Grading**

There will be no curve, and the following grading scale will apply: F: 0-59% D: 60-66% D+: 67-69% C-: 70-72% C: 73-76% C+: 77-79% B-: 80-82% B: 83-86% B+: 87-89%   
A-: 90-92% A: 93-100% A+: **I may give an A+ to the best student in the class; someone who besides achieving an A score, writes the most original paper of the class.**

**Late assignments**

Make every attempt to complete your work by the due date. If you see that you cannot complete an assignment on time, please notify me **before the deadline**. The only accepted excuses are: (i) illness for which you have a doctor’s note, (ii) a university sponsored activity taking place at the time an assignment is due, or (iii) death or family crisis, with proper documentation provided.

**Cheating and Plagiarism**

**Cheating and plagiarism** **will not be tolerated**. All work must be your own. Quotations from other sources must be acknowledged. Close and extensive paraphrasing should not be used. You may and are encouraged to talk with others and discuss the material with them in preparing to write your own work. Yet, the finished product should be clearly attributable to you and you alone. See the *University of Miami Honor Code* for more information on what constitutes cheating and plagiarism –– and how it might be dealt with suspension from the University. Moreover, **note that Blackboard’s safe assignment makes it very easy for teachers to identify plagiarism**.

**Attendance**

I will allow you **five** unexcused absences. **After that, you will lose 1% of your final grade per absence. If you have more than 50% absences, you will fail the course.** The only accepted excuses for missing a class are the following: (i) illness for which you have a doctor’s note, (ii) a university sponsored activity taking place at the time an assignment is due, (iii) death or family crisis, with proper documentation provided; or (iv) religious holiday. The policy of the university regarding religious holidays is that students must inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester of any classes they will have to miss owing to a religious holiday. Otherwise, such absences will count as unexcused. Moreover, **it is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet every class.**

**Class Behavior**

I advise you to bring the readings to class, but this is not mandatory. **Here are some rules. Do not talk with other students regarding matters not related to the class. Do not sleep in class. Do not arrive late. Do not leave the class before its end with no apparent justification. Do not use cell phones or other electronic equipment (tablets, computers, etc.) in class.**