

**PS300X: Ethics and Society**  
**WINTERmester: January 4-15, 2010**

**Dr. Gladden**  
**Political Science Department**  
**Office: Gruening 601B, 474-5418, [ffjng@uaf.edu](mailto:ffjng@uaf.edu)**  
**Office Hours: 11:00-12:00pm, MTWRF**

How should we behave toward other human beings in situations where our actions have the potential to help or harm them? What moral duties do we have to other people, to sentient animals, and even to the natural environment, and on what basis are these moral claims made? These questions invite students to become familiar with and analyze ethical theories claiming to tell us how to decide the right thing to do when confronted with moral problems. Choosing how we ought to live requires us to focus on the daily world of human affairs. Is abortion immoral in all situations, or are some abortions morally justifiable? Is there an important moral distinction between active and passive euthanasia? Is the death penalty a morally justifiable action for persons who are convicted of murder? Is it morally acceptable for people to injure and kill animals in laboratories for medical research purposes? Are there any reasons for protecting air and water quality other than those related to concern for the health and wellness of human beings? Under what conditions is taking a nation to war morally justified?

Any theory of moral values, personal choice, and right conduct must be able to bridge the often wide and deep gap between abstract ethical theories and thorny problems embedded in human life. For example, utilitarian theorists argue that individuals should act in ways that promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people affected by a moral choice. What exactly is happiness, and why should we focus on the consequences of our moral choices? How can we apply this general idea to real life moral issues such as capital punishment or animal rights? The course examines how various authors in the Vaughn textbook go about using ethical egoism, utilitarianism, Kant's theory and others to analyze moral problems and decide the right thing to do. We will look at a wide range of ethical issues: abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment, pornography and censorship, equality and affirmative action, human values and the environment, animal rights, and warfare.

We will find that people often disagree on the right thing to do regarding the above moral issues. This is especially the case in a free society with pluralist values and multiple points of view. The goal of this course is to get you to think in critical terms about the foundations of your own moral values and why you think as you do. By the end of the course you should be able to better articulate, promote, and defend ethical arguments for supporting your beliefs about the right thing to do.

**Required Reading**

Vaughn, Lewis. 2008. *Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues*.  
New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

## Course Requirements

The purpose of PS300X is to teach you several major ethical theories and their application to moral problems that occur in the real world of human affairs. To accomplish this goal, the course combines lectures and discussions on the readings assigned from *Doing Ethics* (2008) by Lewis Vaughn. Students need to complete the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss them on the due dates stated in the syllabus. Given that PS300X is an intensive, two-week course, prior to attending the first class meeting students are to read Chapters 1 and 2, and be prepared to discuss them.

For a two-week course, regular attendance and class preparation are essential and required. To promote the learning process, 20% of the final grade is based on short essay responses to four (4) questions based on the assigned readings. The length of each essay must be 2-3 pages of double spaced text with 12" font and appropriate margins. Each paper is due at the start of class and is worth 5% of the final course grade. They are short critical essays for you to develop an argument supporting your own position on an ethical issue. However, your paper must have some grounding in the assigned readings for the course. For example, you need to cite at least one passage in Baxter's article and another in Taylor's article when writing the essay question on environmental ethics (see the January 13 reading assignment). The essays need to have a thesis and supporting points, and to be organized with an introduction, body, and conclusion. They must be printed out and delivered to me in hard copy when they are due; copies sent electronically are not acceptable.

Students will sit for three (3) green book examinations in class. Exam one is weighted 26%, while exams two and three each are worth 27% of the final grade. The tests are not cumulative and there is no final, comprehensive exam. The questions will consist of short answers (e.g. definitions with examples) and longer essays to test your comprehension of ethical theories and the arguments made in the readings on euthanasia and other moral issues.

You must take the tests in class on the day and time they are scheduled in the syllabus. If you are unable to do this I need to know in advance. We can then make other arrangements to avoid your loss of the exam points. In computing your final course grade I will use the standard grading system: A 100-90, B 89-80, C 79-70, D 69-60, and F 59-0. To accommodate the special needs of any student I will work through the UAF Office of Disabilities Services (203 WHIT, 474-7043). Please contact me if you have any questions.

## Summary of Requirements

- 20% Short Essay Assignments (4 essays at 5% each)
- 26% First Examination: January 7, Thursday, 12:00-1:30
- 27% Second Examination: January 12, Tuesday, 3:00-4:30
- 27% Third Examination: January 15, Friday, 3:00-4:30

## **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, ASSIGNED READINGS, AND ESSAY QUESTIONS**

### **Day 1: January 4**

**12:00-1:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 1: Ethics and the Examined Life**

Christopher Phillips, "What is the Socratic Method?"

Plato, "The Euthyphro"

**1:30-3:00**

**Vaughn, Chapter 2: Subjectivism, Relativism, and Emotivism**

**3:00-4:30**

Ruth Benedict, "Anthropology and the Abnormal"

Mary Midgley, "Trying Out One's New Sword"

### **Day 2: January 5**

**12:00-1:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 3: Evaluating Moral Arguments**

**1:30-3:00**

Vaughn, Chapter 3, Continued

**3:00-4:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 4: The Power of Moral Theories**

### **Day 3: January 6**

**12:00-1:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 5: Consequentialist Theories: Maximize the Good**

**1:30-3:00**

John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism"

**3:00-4:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 6: Nonconsequentialist Theories: Do Your Duty**

Immanuel Kant, "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals"

### **Day 4: January 7**

**12:00-1:30---First Exam (1 hour, 30 minutes)**

**Vaughn, Chapter 8: Abortion**

**1:30-3:00**

Judith Jarvis Thompson, "A Defense of Abortion"

Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion"

**3:00-4:30**

Don Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral"

Cases for Analysis: 1) Aborting Daughters; 2) Parental Notification

## **Day 5: January 8**

**12:00-1:30**

### **Vaughn, Chapter 9: Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide**

James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia"

J. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia"

**1:30-3:00**

Dan Brock, "Voluntary Active Euthanasia"

John Hardwig, "Is There a Duty to Die?"

Cases for Analysis: Hurricane Katrina; 2) Newborns; 3) Admiral Nimitz

**3:00-4:30**

### **Due--Paper #1 Question**

**Is there an important moral distinction between voluntary active and passive euthanasia?**

## **Day 6: January 11**

**12:00-1:30**

### **Vaughn, Chapter 10: Capital Punishment**

Ernest Van den Haag, The Ultimate Punishment

Jeffrey Reiman, Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty: Answering van den Haag

Cases for Analysis: 1) Redemption, 2) Cruel and Unusual Punishment, 3) Representation

**1:30-3:00**

### **Due—Paper #2 Question:**

**Is the death penalty morally justifiable for persons who are convicted of first-degree murder?**

**3:00-4:30**

### **Vaughn, Chapter 11: Pornography and Censorship**

Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Final Report

Wendy McElroy, A Feminist Defense of Pornography

Cases for Analysis: 1) Porn in the Courts, 2) Porn on the Dean's Computer

## **Day 7: January 12**

**12:00-1:30**

### **Vaughn, Chapter 12: Equality and Affirmative Action**

Lisa Newton, Reverse Discrimination as Unjustified

**1:30-3:00pm**

Scott Plous, Ten Myths about Affirmative Action

Cases for Analysis: 1) Preferences for Whites? 2) Are Racial Preferences Harmful?

**3:00-4:30---Second Exam (1 hour, 30 minutes)**

## **Day 8: January 13**

**12:00-1:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 13: Human Values and the Environment**

William Baxter, "People or Penguins"

**1:30-3:00**

Paul Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature"

Cases for Analysis: 1) Tigers, 2) Glaciers, 3) Woodpeckers

**3:00-4:30**

**Due—Paper #3 Question**

**Why should humans care about the environmental quality of the natural world?**

## **Day 9 January 14**

**12:00-1:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 14: Animal Rights**

Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal"

**1:30-3:00**

Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights"

Mary Anne Warren, "Difficulties with the Strong Rights Position"

Cases for Analysis: 1) Animal Testing, 2) Seal Hunting, 3) Snake Charmers

**3:00-4:30**

**Due—Paper #4 Question**

**Is it morally acceptable for humans to cause pain and death to animals in laboratories for medical research purposes?**

## **Day 10: January 15**

**12:00-1:30**

**Vaughn, Chapter 15: Warfare**

Michael Walzer, "Against "Realism"

**1:30-2:00**

John Judis, "Kant and Mill in Baghdad"

Cases for Analysis: 2) War in Afghanistan, 3) Genocide in Rwanda

**3:00-4:30---Third Exam (1 hour, 30 minutes)**