

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### Honors 410-1005: Contemporary Moral Issues

Fall Semester, 2014

Professor William Ramsey

#### I. TEXTS

*Contemporary Moral Arguments: Readings in Ethical Issues, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* edited by Lewis Vaughn. Note that this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, which is the edition you should get. This text should be available at the University Bookstore (on campus). However, many of the reading for this course will also be on the Lied Library Electronic Reserve. Using Mozilla Firefox, go to -- <https://ereserves.library.unlv.edu/eres/default.aspx> -- and follow the instructions for logging in, and then find our course (often can be done by clicking on the Honors department). It is probably wise to download all the articles now and make a folder or binder so that they are easily available. There is also a Webcampus site for this course and occasionally new readings and/or Powerpoint slides will be posted here.

#### II. EVALUATION

There will be a short in-class **Midterm Examination** on **Monday, Oct. 13**, and a cumulative **Final Examination** on **Monday, Dec. 8, 1:00 pm**. There will also be short **writing assignment** (around 3-4 pages) due on **October 1st**, and a longer **writing assignment** (around 6-7 pages) due on **Nov. 24**. Topics for the longer paper will be suggested throughout the semester, and students may also develop their own topic as long as it is cleared in advance. Since no late papers will be accepted without official, university-approved justification, plan your schedules accordingly. (Students should know that one-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located at CDC-301). Finally, there will also be the occasional quiz on the readings to make sure everyone is keeping up. In calculating your final grade, things will be broken down roughly as follows:

Quizzes and Participation: 10%

Midterm: 15%

Short Paper: 15%

Longer Paper: 30%

Final: 30%

#### III. OFFICE HOURS

My office is in the **Central Desert Complex # 4, rm. 411 # 895-2931**. Official hours will be **Mondays and Wednesdays: 11:30-12:30**, and by appointment. However, students are welcome to drop by whenever they wish or arrange alternative meeting times if the official hours are inconvenient. Also, correspondence is possible via e-mail at [wramsey@unlv.edu](mailto:wramsey@unlv.edu), or, in case of emergency, cell at 574-229-7100.

#### IV. COURSE OBJECTIVES AND FORMAT

**There are 2 main Course Objectives:**

1. To provide students with an in-depth understanding of several significant moral problems, including abortion, torture, terrorism, capital punishment, physician-assisted suicide and extreme

poverty. Students will learn about major philosophical positions, arguments, counter-arguments, and analyses of these contemporary moral problems

2. To teach students how to develop and defend their own views on these topics in an intellectually responsible manner. Students will develop critical thinking skills that will enable them to critique, construct and justify different positions and arguments.

### **FORMAT**

Though a part of class may consist of lectures, this will primarily be a discussion-oriented seminar. All students are expected to participate in the seminar discussions. If you aren't speaking up, don't be surprised if you get called upon. At all times, students should feel free to ask questions, offer insights, raise objections, and so on. Students should come to class on time and stay throughout – repeating violators will be penalized.

### **V. DISABILITY STATEMENT**

The Disability Resource Center (DRC) coordinates all academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The DRC is the official office to review and house disability documentation for students, and to provide them with an official Academic Accommodation Plan to present to the faculty if an accommodation is warranted. Accommodations will be provided only if and when they are in receipt of said plan.

UNLV complies with the provisions set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, offering reasonable accommodations to qualified students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137, and the contact numbers are: VOICE (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, FAX (702) 895-0651. *For additional information, please visit: <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>*

### **VI. ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**

Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution. All students must read the Guidelines Regarding Plagiarism included in the "Course Material" on E-reserve. You should also look at the "Student Academic Misconduct Policy" (approved December 9, 2005) located at: <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html>. You are also encouraged to read the University's policy on copyright and fair use laws located at: <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/>.

### **VII. TOPICS AND READINGS (A ROUGH GUIDE)**

As noted above, this course is designed to provide a philosophical analysis of various contemporary moral problems and debates. In most cases, we will look at arguments from opposing sides of the issue. Sometimes we will examine an argument for a particular position, and then criticisms of that argument; other times we might look at independent arguments for and against a given position. Because some of the articles are difficult and will require more than

one reading, a strong effort has been made to minimize the quantity of material (though some weeks will still be demanding). A good strategy would be to read all of the material for an upcoming week once during the preceding weekend, and then carefully once again during the week we are discussing it. Because I want the seminar discussion to dictate the amount of time we spend on each topic, and not the other way around, no dates have been provided – we will begin by moving down the list as the semester proceeds. However, because we will not be able to make it through the entire list, students should be thinking about which of the latter topics they prefer. Later in the semester we will vote to determine which remaining topics we will study.

Weeks 1 & 2

### **A. Moral Reasoning and Moral Theories**

Readings ('CMA' = Contemporary Moral Arguments; 'ER' = Electronic Reserve):

*ER:*

Course Material

*CMA:*

Moral Reasoning, pp. 1-23

Against Moral Relativism (Pojman), pp. 31-43

Ethics and Rationality (Rachels): pp. 55-60

Moral Theories, pp. 62-73

### **B. Beginning of Life Issues**

#### **Abortion**

Arguments Based Upon Personhood

*CMA:* pp. 118-124

On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion (Warren): pp. 124-130

The being in the Womb Is a Person (Schwartz): pp. 130-139

Abortion: A Defense of the Personhood Argument (Pojman): pp. 140-147

An Almost Absolute Value in History (Noonan): pp. 157-162

The Argument For A Fetus's Right to a Future

*CMA:*

Why Abortion is Immoral (Marquis): pp. 148-155

*ER:*

Abortion and the Neo-Natal Right to Life (Paske)

Does a Fetus Already Have a Future-Like-Ours? (McInerney)

The Argument For A Women's Right to Bodily Autonomy

*CMA:*

A Defense of Abortion (Thomson): pp. 182-193

Arguments from Bodily Rights (Beckwith): pp. 193-201

*ER:*

Boonin Rebuttals (Boonin)

#### **Cloning**

*CMA:* pp. 318-321

Cloning Human Beings (Brock): pp. 335-343

A life in the Shadows ((Holm): pp. 344-347

## **C. End of Life Issues**

### **Euthanasia**

*CMA*: pp. 264-270

#### **The Autonomy Argument**

When Self-Determination Runs Amok (Callahan): pp. 278-283

When Abstract Moral Reasoning Runs Amok (Lachs): pp. 283-287

#### **Killing vs. Letting Die**

Active and Passive Euthanasia (Rachels): pp. 287-292

Is Killing No Worse Than Letting Die? (Nesbitt): pp. 292-296

### **Death Penalty**

*CMA*: pp. 348-352

#### **The Retributivist Argument**

A Life for a Life (Primoratz): pp. 356-362

An Eye for an Eye? (Nathanson): pp. 362-367

#### **The Deterrence Argument**

Capital Punishment and Social Defense (Bedau): pp. 388-394

### **Terrorism and Torture**

*CMA*: pp. 398-404

#### **Terrorism**

The Morality of Terrorism (Khatchadourian): pp. 429-439

Can Terrorism Be Justified? (Valls): pp. 446-456

#### **Torture**

*ER*: Torture: Stanford Encyclopedia Entry

*CMA*:

The case for Torturing the Ticking Bomb Terrorist (Dershowitz): pp. 456-468

## **D. Controversial Sexual Behavior**

*ER*: Feminist Perspectives on Sex Markets: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Entry

### **Pornography**

*CMA*: 469-472

Pornography, Civil Rights, and Speech (Mackinnon): 511-522

Women and Pornography (Dworkin): 522-530

*ER*:

Frustrations of a Feminist Porn Star (Hartley)

### **Prostitution**

*ER*:

Charges Against Prostitution (Ericsson)

Defending Prostitution: Charges Against Ericsson (Pateman)

## **E. Controversial Social Issues (TBD)**

### **Famine Relief**

*CMA*: 682-683

Famine, Affluence, and Morality (Singer): 683-690  
World Hunger and Population (Pojman): 690-700

*ER:*

The Life You Can Save (Singer)

### **Drug Policy**

*CMA:* 216-224

Against the Legalization of Drugs (Wilson): 224-233

A Moral Right to Use Drugs (Husak): 233-240

*ER:*

America's Unjust Drug War (Huemer)

### **Gay Marriage**

*ER:*

Is it Wrong to Discriminate on the Basis of Homosexuality? (Jordan)

Same-Sex Marriage and the Argument from Public Disagreement (Boonin)

### **Health Care**

*CMA:* 538-548

Is There a Right to Health Care, and If So, What Does it Encompass? (Daniels): pp. 548-556

The Right to a Decent Minimum of Health Care (Buchanan): pp. 557-558

### **Affirmative Action**

*ER:*

Preferential Hiring (Thomson)

Preferential Hiring: A Reply to Thomson (Simon)

### **Animal Rights**

*CMA:* 572-578

All Animals are Equal (Singer) pp. 578-588

The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research (Cohen): pp. 588-594

The Moral Argument for Vegetarianism (Rachels): pp. 616-622

Moral Vegetarianism and the Argument from Pain and Suffering (Frey): 622-627

### **Gambling**

*ER:*

Is Gambling Immoral? A Virtue Ethics Approach (Collins)

Gambling and Character (Fletcher)