**Contemporary Moral Issues**

**PHI 130-C (3295) –– Spring 2020**

Instructor: Felipe G. A. Moreira

Room: Mahoney/Pearson Com 118

Time: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10:10 – 11:00AM

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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 2:30-3:30 PM at my office (Ashe 715) and by appointment (Let me know in advance if you would like to meet)

Website: Blackboard (all required reading are available on Blackboard)

**Class Description**

Contemporary moral issues are ongoing ethical and/or political disputes regarding which no consensus has been reached. Examples of such disputes are: What is a terrorist? Can there be a just war? What is a natural sexual practice? Is homosexuality unnatural? Should we believe in God for practical purposes? Should we use violence when opposing racism? Are Donald Trump’s policies warranted by God? Is there a God of capitalism? Is Trump a fascist? What is Bernie Sanders’ democratic socialism? Should we be allowed to genetically intervene in ourselves and in our kids? Is suicide a morally permissible action? Is it morally permissible for the state to kill a criminal? Should abortion be a crime and a humiliation? Do we live in a culture of political correctness? What is the right-wing/left-wing distinction? Is pornography to be banished? What is the difference between sexual harassment and sexual assault? Can there be a morally permissible school shooting? Is God dead? This class approaches all of these disputes by considering two kinds of writings: non-academic writings by deviants (e.g., Charles Manson), politicians (e.g., Donald Trump) and/or writers (e.g., Anaïs Nin); and writings by distinguished philosophers. The class has two sections. The first section addresses those who deal with contemporary moral issues by using the concept of “God”. The second section discusses those who approach contemporary moral issues without relying on this concept.

**Warning**

**We will discuss in a straightforward way extremely controversial issues (e.g., racism, sexual assault, pornography, school shooting, etc.) practically every class. You are strongly advised to not enroll in this class, if (a) you are unable or unwilling to respect the opinions of those who disagree with you; and/or (b) you feel that to discuss these issues is inappropriate, offensive, useless and/or may trigger extremely painful memories that you wish to forget.**

**Class Goals**

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

To teach how to read philosophical texts in a political way

To introduce some of the main ethical theories

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

To discuss several issues of contemporary American politics

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.

January 13 (First class, Introduction): Outline of the Class. Reading: Syllabus

1. **God is Alive**

January 15 and 17:External Terrorism. Readings: Osama Bin Laden’s “To the Americans”, George W. Bush’s “September 20th, 2001 Speech” and Chomsky’s “Reflections on 9/11”

*January 20: No Class (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)*

January 22, 24, 27 and 29: Aquinas on Just War, God’s Existence and Natural Sexual Practices. Readings: Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* — selected excerpts on *Just War* (Part II-II, Question 40, Article 1); *God* (Part I, Question 2, Articles 1, 2 and 3); *Natural Sexual Practices* (Part II-I, Question 94, Article 2 and Part II-II, Question 154, Article 11). Recommended: Vaughn’s “Anselm and Aquinas”

January 31 and February 3: Homosexuality. Movie Class. “Milk” (2008) by Gus Van Sant

February 5 and 7. Should we believe in God for practical purposes? Readings: Pascal’s “Wager”, and Ronald Munson’s “Utilitarianism”

February 10, 12 and 14: Racism. Readings: Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” (August 28th, 1963), and Malcolm X’s “Oxford Union Debate” (December 3rd, 1964). Recommended: Cornel West’s “Moral Fire-Martin Luther King Jr.”, Cornel West’s “Revolutionary Fire-Malcolm X”, and Spike Lee’s movie “Malcolm X”.

February 17 and 19:Donald Trump’s God*.* Readings: Trump’s *The Art of the Deal* (chapter 2) and “Inaugural Address” (January 20th, 2017).

February 21 and 24: Max Weber on the God of Capitalism. Reading: Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (“Part 1—The Problem”)

February 26: Is Trump a Fascist? Reading: Jason Stanley’s *How Fascism works?* (“Introduction”)

February 28: Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism. Reading: Sanders’ “Oligarchy and Authoritarianism Speech” (June 12th, 2019)

1. **God is Dead**

March 2 and 4: Artificial Selection. Readings: Hitler’s *My Struggle* (excerpt; “Chapter XI: Race and People”), and John Harris’s “Is gene therapy a form of eugenics?”. Recommended: “Unnatural Selection” (Netflix TV Show)

March 6: Suicide. Reading: Kurt Cobain’s “Suicide Note”

*Spring Break: March 7-15*

March 16 and 18: Death Penalty. Readings: Charles Manson’s “Court Transcript, November 19, 1970”, and Munson’s “Kant’s Ethics”

March 20: Abortion. Readings: Anaïs Nin’s *Mirages: The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1939–1947* (excerpt), and Munson’s “Theories Without Principles”

March 23: Political Correctness. Movie Class. “The Bird Revelation” (2017), a Comedy Special by David Chappelle

March 25, 27 and 30: Deleuze on the right-wing/left-wing distinction. Reading: Selected excerpts from Deleuze, and Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?”

**Draft’s Due Date: March 30th (minimum: 500 words)**

April 1 and 3: Pornography. Readings: Linda Lovelace’s *Ordeal* (excerpt), Oriana Small’s *Girlvert: A Porno Memoir* (excerpt), Catherine MacKinnon’s “Pornography as Trafficking” and Gayle Rubin’s “Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong: An Analysis of Anti-pornography politics”. Recommended: Rob Epstein’s and Jeffrey Friedman’s movie “Lovelace” and Jill Bauer’s and Ronna Gradus’s documentary “Hot Girls Wanted”

April 6: Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault. Reading: Katie Way’s “I went on a date with Aziz Ansari. It turned into the worst night of my life”

April 8: Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault. Movie Class. “Right Now” (2019), a Comedy Special by Aziz Ansari

April 10, 13 and 15: School Shooting (Internal Terrorism)*.* Readings: Eric Harris’s “Diaries”, Dylan Klebold’s “Diaries”, Peter Langman’s “Influences on the Ideology of Eric Harris” and Ralph Larkin’s “The Columbine Legacy: Rampage Shootings as Political Acts”.

April 17, 20 and 22: Nietzsche on the Death of God*.* Readings: Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke* *Zarathustra* (Zarathustra’s Prologue”), and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1st Essay). Recommended: Vaughn’s “Nietzsche”

April 24 (Last Class, Conclusion): Review of the Class

**Final Paper’s Due Date: April 29th (minimum: 1500 words). There is no final exam**

**Requirements**

**Participation Points:** **20%**. Participation in this class is mandatory. Students should make valuable contributions to discussions at least once a week. **Participation points are not “symbolic”. Students who do not participate in class and/or disrespect the behavioral rules stated in what follows will lose participation points. Students who constantly disrespect behavioral rules may lose *all* participation points, and their final papers will be graded more severely.**

**Take Home Assignments Points: 50 %**. Students should submit hard copies of their take-home assignments at the beginning of every class, except the first one. **Take home assignments must be typed.** These assignments will be worthy between 1% to 2% each, and they will ask you to answer a question related to the required readings. Use your best judgment in determining the length of your response. Some assignments will require you to write a single phrase; others will require you to write one paragraph or two. **Submissions of take-home assignments by e-mail are not allowed. 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**. You should keep all of your graded take-home assignments in a file. If you request a revision of your take-home assignment grade in the end of the class, you will need to present copies of all your graded assignments.

**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 submit a draft. Your drafts will receive comments and you are expected to revise them in accordance with such comments before submitting your final paper. **The draft and the final paper should be submitted on Blackboard**; no hard copies are required. On Blackboard, you will also find **Final Paper’s Topics** and the **Evaluative Criteria** adopted to grade them. **The due dates are:**

**Draft: March 30th (minimum: 500 words)**

**Final Paper: April 29th (minimum: 1500 words)**

**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.**

**Behavioral Rules of the Class**

**Students should *not* use cell phones or any other electronic equipment (tablets, computers, etc.) during class. Students should *not* talk with other students regarding matters not related to the class. Students should *not* sleep in class. Students should *not* arrive late without providing justification. Students should *not* leave the class before its end without providing justification. Students should *not* come to class just to sign the attendance sheet. Students should *not* miss a class and ask someone to put their names in the attendance sheet. Students should *not* disrespect me, other students or the content of the class. More specifically, students should *not* giggle among themselves or after checking their cell phones, while we are discussing extremely controversial issues, such as racism, Nazism, terrorism, etc.**