

✓ Online, hybrid course
- Ethics

Introduction to Ethics
PHIL 2306.020 (hybrid) CRN 11722
Palo Alto College
Spring 2017 (Januray 17—May 13)

INSTRUCTOR:

Name: Peter Van Dusen, MA
Phone: (210) 724-1614 (cell/voicemail)
(210) 485-0414 (office)
(210) 486-3040 (department)
E-mail: Canvas internal messaging (primary)
pvandusen@alamo.edu (ACES)(secondary)
flosfr399bc@icloud.com (backup)
Website: CANVAS (Alamo Colleges, ACES, under "My Courses")
Office: Telephone conference whenever desired
Canvas chatroom by mutual arrangement
In-person meetings by appointment
Classroom: Guadalupe Hall, Room 102

TEXT: *Highlights in the History of Western Ethics*

Peter Van Dusen (This 20-page handout is at our Canvas site.)

We will read the above handout with additional handouts provided in Canvas from time to time. (There is no required textbook to buy or rent.)

FILMS: *Gone Baby Gone* (2007)

Pay It Forward (2000)

The Village (2004)

The Shawshank Redemption (1994)

These 4 movies are required.

PRE-REQUISITES: There are no official prerequisites, but ENGL 1301 & 1302 are strongly recommended. Good writing skills will enhance the likelihood of success in the course.

OVERVIEW: This course is an exercise in **careful thinking** about the foundations of our moral values—carried on through dialogue with your classmates and with the instructor. The conversation is about the nature of the good life, good behavior, good people and good societies. **Ethics**—also called *philosophy of morality*, *philosophical ethics*, or *moral philosophy*—seeks the deepest principles for our moral thinking. When we say, "slavery is evil," or "same-sex marriage is wrong," we need **justifications** for such claims. And then we want to know whether those justifications go beyond individual, cultural and religious differences.

Some of the questions we will consider:

- (1) Is there one foundation for morality, or many?
- (2) Does moral thinking depend on religion or religious faith?
- (3) Is the pursuit of happiness different for everyone?
- (4) Is there a relationship between ethics and the pursuit of happiness?
- (5) When important values conflict, can they be resolved?
- (6) Can we *know* right and wrong? Or is it just opinion?
- (7) How is ethics different from the social sciences?

The course is intended to help you think about these further questions:

- Where do my beliefs about right & wrong ultimately originate?
- Are my moral beliefs valid and internally consistent?
- Could I improve my thinking about the right and the good?
- Can I become a better and happier person, or live a better life?

Your time will be spent on:

- (a) Reading the course handout (and completing quizzes for each section).
- (b) Watching 4 films.
- (c) Participating in online discussions of the films and the handout.
- (d) Four (4) 300-350 word personal journals spaced out over the semester.
- (e) In-class discussion every Monday, 5:30—6:45pm.

PROCESS:

- (1) Discussion Boards: These are ongoing, class-wide (public) discussions about the reading assignments and the 4 films. These discussions are accessible to you 24/7, so that you can moderate your own level of participation.
- (2) Journal Entries: *These will be private*. One entry is due every 4 weeks for a total of 4 entries. Topics are drawn from the discussion board conversations.
- (3) Classroom: We'll meet every Monday, 5:30—6:45pm to augment our online discussions.

Throughout all of these activities, we will:

- (a) Become familiar with reflecting on moral issues in a philosophical way.
- (b) Challenge each other's thinking in ways that are stimulating, courteous, respectful and compassionate.

At the conclusion of the course, you should be better able to:

1. Discriminate relevant from irrelevant points in moral reasoning.
2. Value reflective moral deliberation over mere opinion.
3. Appreciate the role of moral reflection in pursuing a good life.
4. Distinguish religious from non-religious foundations for moral thinking.
5. Be conversant with some of the basic concepts in Western moral thought.
6. Apply clearer thinking to social issues and life situations.
7. Distinguish the work of ethics from that of the social and behavioral sciences (psychology, sociology & anthropology).

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY—

Taking a Philosophy Course Online:

If you took this course fully face-to-face, on campus, we would meet twice each week for a total of 2.5 hours of class time. As a hybrid class, we will meet on campus for 1.25 hours each week, instead. Outside of class and online, you should spend at least 3 times the in-class time on preparation and discussion board participation. This means about **5 hours per week** outside of class.

You cannot spend *less* time than that in an online course and expect to do well in it. This means a minimum of **45 minutes per day, every day**. Not all of it is necessarily online, but you should **log on and participate every day**. Log on to Canvas and read Discussion Boards (DBs) every day. Frequent short periods of time work better than long, infrequent blocks of time.

The online advantage:

Aside from our single weekly class meeting, you choose whatever time of day works best for your online participation.

The online disadvantages:

(1) To do *well*, most online students find that they must spend a little *more* time on the course than they do for face-to-face classes.

(2) You must be a good time manager—no one will remind you to log on!