Proposal for a Junior-Senior Cluster Course

Title of proposed course: Phl 213 Life and Death Issues

When will this course be offered?: At least one term each year beginning 1996-1997.

Title of cluster: Morality

Name of cluster proposal coordinator: Byron L. Haines

A. Course Description (100 words or less). This course will deal with a variety of issues that are, for human beings, matters of life and death. Such topics may include abortion, suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, famine, nuclear disarmament and proliferation, etc. There will be, characteristically, ten class meetings on each of the chosen topics. While the stress will be on the philosophical aspects of each of these issues, relevant empirical data will also be considered. Students will be expected to become familiar with the various relevant arguments that bear on these issues and to present, orally and in writing, their own reasoning and tentative conclusions concerning them.

B. Course Development. This is an existing course.

C. General Education Goals.

I. Inquiry and Critical Thinking. Students, will be expected to research the relevant empirical data and to critically evaluate the arguments that bear on the issues.

II. Communication. An important feature of communication is listening. On issues as emotionally charged as these ones it can be extremely difficult for persons to listen to the arguments of the other side. While students will be encouraged to reach their own reasoned, though tentative, conclusions concerning these issues, they will be encouraged to listen to, and understand, arguments for conclusions with which they might be inclined to disagree.

III. Human Experience. Some of these issues - e.g., abortion and euthanasia - are ones with which many students may have direct personal contact. Others - e.g., the death penalty and food distribution on a hungry planet - are ones which, while they may be spared the direct impact on their personal lives, are ones about which they may have to make decisions of a political nature.
IV. Ethical Issues and Social Responsibility. To be a responsible human being and citizen one needs to try to think well about these issues. Nothing else needs to be added to I-III above.

D. Course Outline. This course will characteristically be taught by Peter Nicholls, though occasionally by Byron Haines or others. It will be taught at least once each year, beginning 1996-1997. A sample outline is attached.
PHL 213  Life and Death Issues  
PHL 199  Abortion  
Byron Haines  
Summer 1995  
Reading Assignment on Abortion  

- **Tue. June 20**, Rachels, "Does Morality Depend on Religion?" and White  
  Introduction to Abortion, pp. 85-89. (Excerpts from Supreme Court decisions,  
  Roe v. Wade (1973) and Casey (1992) are included as background.)

- **Wed. June 21**, Noonan, "An Almost Absolute Value in History" and  
  Donceel, "A Liberal Catholic View."


- **Tue. June 27**, English, "Abortion and the Concept of a Person."

- **Wed. June 28**, Brady, "Opposition to Abortion: A Human Rights  
  Approach."

- **Thur. June 29**, Marquis, "Why Abortion is Immoral."

- **Mon. July 3**, Tooley, "Abortion and Infanticide."

- **Wed. July 5**, Review.

**NOTE:** The readings do not appear in the above order in your packet. You  
will have to look for them.

The writing assignment will be presented in class.
Abortion Writing Assignment  
(Life & Death Issues,  
Phl 213 & Abortion, Phl 199, Summer 95)

Among the authors we have read, three of them (Noonan, Brody, and Marquis) have presented arguments against abortion. Present, explain, and critically discuss, the position and arguments of at least one of these authors. (You are, of course, welcome to make reference to more than one of them, but it is better to focus on specific arguments than to engage in a shotgun approach.)

Judith Thompson defends abortion, though in more limited ways than it is defended by Mary Anne Warren. Explain the difference in the positions of Thompson and Warren. Present, explain, and critically discuss the position and arguments of either Thompson or Warren. (Again, you may wish to consider the arguments of both, as well as the position of Jane English.)

In the light of discussion of the above issues try to reach your own tentative but reasoned, conclusions concerning the morality of abortion. From the moral point of view how should the fetus (or embryo) be regarded? What are the rights of the pregnant woman with regard to having, or not having, an abortion? What should be the legal status of abortion? Note that it is the reasons that you have that are interesting.

This will likely require 4-7 pp., though length as such is not important.

Due Monday, July 10 (though before that would be nice.)
Reading Assignments:
Euthanasia Summer 1995

4. July 12 Foot, “Euthanasia”.
7. July 18 Williams “‘Mercy-Killing’ Legislation”
Writing Assignment for Euthanasia Class, Summer 1995

What is Euthanasia? Distinguish between passive and active euthanasia. Under what sorts of circumstances is passive euthanasia justified? Is active euthanasia ever justified? If you think not, give your reasons. Include in your reasoning rebuttals of Rachels’ defense of euthanasia. If you think yes, then (a) indicate the kind of circumstances that would justify it, and (b) critically consider some of the main arguments (e.g., those of Kamisar and Dyke) against it. What should be the legal status of euthanasia (active and passive)? Give your reasons.

Of course physician assisted suicide, as permitted in the recently passed Oregon ballot measure does not strictly fall under either passive or active euthanasia. However, you may in your paper want to give some consideration to it.

Length: ca. 5-7 pp.

Due Date: Thursday, July 27 or before.
Reading Assignments (in packet available at Clean Copy):

- **July 25-27** Bedau, “Capital Punishment”
- **July 31** van den Haag, “On Deterrence and the Death Penalty”
- **Aug. 1** Bedau, “Deterrence and the Death Penalty: A Reconsideration.”
- **Aug. 2** Goldberg, “So What if the Death Penalty Deters?”
- **Aug. 3** Haines, “Human Rights, the Moral Community, and the Death Penalty”
- **Aug. 7-10** excerpts from court cases, Furman v. Georgia, and Gregg v. Georgia, and Radin, “Cruel Punishment and Respect for Persons: Super Due Process for Death”

Writing Assignment:

Should a decent (albeit imperfect) society have the death penalty? If so, for what offenses, and with what kinds of safeguards (i.e., to avoid imposing on the innocent, those for whom it is otherwise inappropriate, such as the mentally incompetent, mentally ill, etc., or arbitrarily, on grounds of race, economic class, etc.)? What is the justification for the death penalty? — i.e., retribution, deterrence, or what?

If you think that a decent society should not have the death penalty, why not? Whatever position you take give your reasons and present carefully and critically discuss what you take to be the main arguments on the other side.

**DUE WEDNESDAY AUG. 9**, though can be accepted until 5:00 PM Friday Aug. 11 at the Philosophy Dept. office NH 471, or Haines' office, NH M427.