

Department of Justice, Law and Society
School of Public Affairs
The American University

Spring 2004

JLS.301.001 - DRUGS, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND HUMAN FULFILLMENT

Wednesdays, 11:20 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.

Ward 104

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Office hours: (by appointment—phone or email)

Course Description

[From the catalogue: Positive approaches to achieving alternative states of consciousness with and without drugs; the nonaddictive use of addicting drugs; a balanced assessment of the latest findings on the dangers and benefits of the most widely used nonopiate recreational drugs, such as marijuana, tobacco, caffeine, alcohol, quaaludes, and cocaine; choices for individuals and society regarding the use and control of the substances.]

Most people believe alcohol and illegal drugs cause "addiction." They believe "addiction" is involuntary and characterized by "loss of control" over alcohol and drug consumption. They also believe addiction is a "treatable disease." If you challenge those ideas, you are likely to be labeled ignorant at best and a heretic at worst. In this course, you will comprehend the fiction about drugs and addiction masquerading as fact, and the fact about drugs and addiction most people regard as fiction.

Together, we will examine accurate versus inaccurate definitions of addiction. We will review empirical evidence supporting the idea that people use drugs to change their perception of themselves and the world for existential and psychological reasons, not necessarily for chemical or biological reasons. We will investigate the scientific validity of the claim that addiction is a treatable disease.

We will also examine the religious, moral, and ethical bases of drug use, e.g., how alcohol and drug use becomes a "central activity" in a person's life—and why this is so. We will review how illegal mind-altering drugs and their users are victims of religious and political persecution. Drawing on philosophical, psychoanalytic, sociological, and psychological perspectives, we will investigate existential explanations for why people choose to use drugs as a way to attempt to escape from reality and what it means to be an autonomous, "heroic," or "self-actualized" person. Finally, we will examine Buddhist perspectives on the nature of human suffering.

In this course you will learn

- (1) how drug use is a way to avoid coping with life;
- (2) how drug use is a form of self-deception;
- (3) how drug use is a religious activity;
- (4) how treatment for addiction is a religious activity;
- (5) how thinking about drug addiction as a disease is a form of self-deception;
- (6) a Buddhist perspective on contemporary psychology and psychiatry to increase understanding of self-imposed suffering and problems-in-living usually labeled "mental illness" and addiction disease;
- (7) new ways of self-examination leading to greater consciousness and human fulfillment.

Lecture and discussion format.

Course Objectives

- To improve the student's scientific and psychologically-oriented thinking about drugs, consciousness and human fulfillment.
- To evaluate the evidence supporting and contesting the idea that addiction exists, is characterized by involuntariness, and is treatable.
- To explore the sociological basis for mainstream ideas about addiction with particular emphasis on the nature and practice of scapegoating.
- To understand what happens in involuntary treatment for drug addiction.
- To understand philosophical, psychoanalytic, and psychological perspectives on why people choose to use mind-altering drugs.
- To comprehend the meaning of being an existentially-heroic individual.
- To learn about Buddhist perspectives on human suffering and their relation to contemporary western psychological perspectives.
- To develop skill in debating these and related controversial issues in public policy settings.

Required Texts

Becker, E. (1997). *The denial of death*. New York: Free Press

Leifer, R. (1997). *The happiness project: Transforming the three poisons that cause the suffering we inflict on ourselves and others*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Press.

Schaler, J.A. (2000). *Addiction is a choice*. Chicago: Open Court

Szasz, T. (1985). *Ceremonial chemistry: The ritual persecution of drugs, addicts, and pushers*. Revised edition. Holmes Beach, Fl.: Learning Publications, Inc.

Course Requirements and Grades

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|----------------------|------------|
| First paper | 10% |
| Mid-term examination | 30% |
| Second paper | 10% |
| Final examination | 45% |
| Class participation | 5% |
| <hr/> | |
| Total = 100% | |

First paper: Five typewritten pages max. Explain, based on your readings and our discussions in class, how addiction (and drug use in general) is or is not a religious activity. Include principles we've covered in class. Differentiate between fact and your opinion. You're encouraged to express your opinion, just make sure you articulate the difference between fact and opinion. Typed. Double-spaced. **In text references like this (Schaler, 2000).** References as the books are listed on this syllabus. Make sure your paragraphs are not too long. Make sure there is proper transition between paragraphs and ideas. Make sure you don't introduce new ideas in your conclusion. Make sure your spelling is accurate. Don't rely on colloquialisms. Use a dictionary. You must write complete sentences. Don't begin a sentence with "However," or "Therefore,". Keep your writing, terms, tenses, parallel.

Many readings and notices regarding class will be sent to you by the professor via email. Make sure you are receiving the emails and reading them.

You will be randomly assigned to groups with other students occasionally to present summaries of readings. This will contribute to your grade for participation.

Second paper: Five typewritten pages max. You are to write about how your views on drugs and consciousness have changed or not changed since you've been in this class. Same requirements as the first paper re writing.

Academic Integrity Code

"Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. It is expected that all examinations, tests, written papers, and other assignments will be completed according to the standards set forth in this code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course."

CLASS SCHEDULE

| Date | Topic | Reading |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| January 14 | Drugs as scapegoat | Szasz ix-60 |
| January 21 | Drugs and medicine as magic | Szasz 61-124 |
| January 28 | Medicine as social control | Finish Szasz |
| February 4 | Addiction Is a Choice | Chapters 1-5 |
| February 11 | Addiction Is a Choice | Chapters 6-11 |
| February 18 | Addiction Is a Choice | Finish |
| February 25 | Film - 1st paper due | |

March 3 Mid-term examination – Essay

Note: You must take the mid-term examination on March 3. No exceptions.
(March 5 is the last day to drop this class.)

| March 10 | Spring break, no class - | Reading over break |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Depth psychology of heroism | Becker ix-124 |
| March 17 | The failures of heroism | Becker 125-252 |
| March 24 | The dilemmas of heroism | Becker 253- end |
| March 31 | Introduction and the Buddhist view | Leifer 11-122 |
| | Western views of suffering | Leifer 123-158 |
| April 7 | Western views of desire | Leifer 159-214 |
| | Western views of self | Leifer 215-264 |
| April 14 | Transforming suffering | Leifer 265-288 |
| April 21 | Film - 2nd paper due | |
| April 28 | No class | |
| May 5 | Final examination | 11:20 A.M. to 1:50 P.M |

Note: You must take the final exam on May 5. No exceptions.

Check your email regularly for class readings, announcements, etc.

Note: Clear and accurate writing will be taken into account in assigning grades, as well as participation in class discussions. Material discussed in class, or in films, and not in any of the readings, may form the basis for questions on the examinations.

One grade reduction for over three class absences. Students are responsible for anything covered in class during their absence. Readings must be completed by the session to which they are assigned. Additional readings may be assigned during the course.

Students are encouraged to form study groups on their own. Grades: A-=90, B+=89, B-=80, C+=79, C-=70