

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

Spring 2007

**ILS.301.001 - DRUGS, CONSCIOUSNESS AND HUMAN FULFILLMENT**

Wednesdays, 2:10 P.M. to 4:50 P.M.

Ward 101

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Office hours: (by appointment)

**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 many people regard as fiction.

Together, we will examine accurate versus inaccurate definitions of addiction: You will understand the analytic and synthetic truth about 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, for example, how alcohol and drug use becomes a "central activity" in a person's life-and why. 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**

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Vocabulary quiz      | 10% |
| Mid-term examination | 30% |
| Paper                | 10% |
| Final examination    | 40% |
| Class participation  | 10% |
| <hr/>                |     |
| Total = 100%         |     |

**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. Differentiate between opinion and fact. We will discuss how you are to write your paper in class.

**Vocabulary quiz:** A quiz on terms and phrases related to readings and discussions in class

### **CLASS SCHEDULE**

| <b>Date</b>     | <b>Topic</b>                     | <b>Reading</b>   |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| January 17      | Drugs as scapegoat               | Szasz ix-60      |
| January 24      | Drugs and medicine as magic      | Szasz 61-124     |
| January 31      | Medicine as social control       | Finish Szasz     |
| February 7      | Addiction Is a Choice            | Chapters 1-5     |
| February 14     | Addiction Is a Choice            | Chapters 6-9     |
| February 21     | Addiction Is a Choice            | Chapter 10-11    |
| February 28     | Ideology of Alcoholics Anonymous | Handouts/lecture |
| <b>March 7</b>  | <b>Vocabulary quiz</b>           | <b>Review</b>    |
| <b>March 14</b> | <b>Mid-term examination</b>      |                  |

|                 |   |                              |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|
| <b>March 21</b> | <b>Spring break</b> , no class—Reading over break |                              |
|                 | Depth psychology of heroism                       | Becker ix-124                |
| March 28        | The failures of heroism                           | Becker 125-252               |
| April 4         | The dilemmas of heroism                           | Becker 253- end              |
| April 11        | Introduction and the Buddhist view                | Leifer 11-122                |
| April 18        | Western views of suffering                        | Leifer 123-158               |
| April 25        | Western views of desire                           | Leifer 159-214               |
|                 | Western views of self                             | Leifer 215-264               |
|                 | Transforming suffering                            | Leifer 265-finish            |
|                 | <b>Paper due</b>                                  |                              |
| May 2           | Study day, no class                               |                              |
| <b>May 9</b>    | <b>Final Examination</b>                          | <b>2:10 P.M. – 4:40 P.M.</b> |

Check your email for class readings, announcements, etc., and Blackboard.

**Note:** Clear and accurate writing—including accurate spelling on exams and papers—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.

**Exams must be taken on the dates assigned. One grade reduction for over three class absences.** No fault absence policy: This means no note is required for your absence, however, the penalty applies for over three absences, regardless of reason. Save the three you have without penalty in case you get sick or have a family emergency. 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. **You are encouraged to have at least one meeting with Professor Schaler to go over your work in this course.** Make appointments early. Don't wait until the end of the semester. **Check your email for class readings, announcements, etc.** Check Blackboard for announcements.

### **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."