Philosophy Department

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE
1200 Academy St. Kalamazoo, MI 49006

PHI 410
Problems in Philosophy: Ethics
Fall 1997
2:40 - 3:55 MWF

Professor Ted Toadvine
203 Humphrey House

Course Description

Ethics is a branch of philosophy which seeks to answer questions about what sort of person one should be, and how to determine what is the right course of action in a particular situation. After an introduction to the subject matter of ethical theory and our motivations for studying it, we will begin by examining some common ethical views, including egoism, divine command theory, and relativism. Then, we will explore the most important traditional ethical theories, including natural law theory, utilitarianism, and Kantian ethical theory. Lastly, we will evaluate several contemporary reactions against traditional ethical theory: the ethics of care, particularism, ethical expertise, and virtue ethics. Our examination of these ethical theories will be directed by the following questions: How is ethics reliant on religion and/or culture? Are universal ethical judgements possible or desirable? What role does reason play in ethical decision-making? Does the study of ethical theory contribute to our pursuit of "the good life?"

Requirements

Two mid-terms will be in-class examinations based on class readings and discussions (including both short answer and essay questions). The final examination will be a 10-12 page type-written response to questions distributed in advance and may draw on material covered throughout the course. Attendance and participation in class discussions are expected.

Texts

Mark Timmons (ed.), Conduct & Character: Readings in Moral Theory, 2nd ed.
Reading Packet including the following:
  - Lawrence Kohlberg, "Indoctrination v. Relativity in Value Education"
  - Lawrence Blum, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory"
George Sher, "Other Voices, Other Rooms? Women's Psychology and Moral Theory"
Hubert & Stuart Dreyfus, "What is Morality?"

Tentative Schedule

WEEK 1  Introduction to the Course
Timmons, Introduction, 1-23

WEEK 2  Egoism
Plato, "The Myth of Gyges"
James Rachels, "Egoism and Moral Skepticism"

WEEK 3  Divine Command Theory & Relativism
John Arthur, "Morality without God"
Ruth Benedict, "A Defense of Ethical Relativism"
James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism"

WEEK 4  Natural Law Theory
St. Thomas Aquinas, "Treatise on Law"
Emmett Barcalow, "Problems for Natural Law Theory"

MIDTERM I

WEEK 5  Utilitarianism
Jeremy Bentham, "The Principle of Utility"
J.S. Mill, "In Defense of Utilitarianism"
John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules"

WEEK 6
J. L. Mackie, "The Ethics of Fantasy"

Kantian Ethical Theory
Immanuel Kant, "The Moral Law and Autonomy of the Will"
Elliot Sober, "Kant's Moral Theory"

WEEK 7
Onora O'Neill, "Kant on Treating People as Ends in Themselves"
Fred Feldman, "On Treating People as Ends in Themselves: A Critique of Kant"

MIDTERM II

WEEK 8  Ethics of Care
Lawrence Kohlberg, "Indoctrination v. Relativity in Value Education" (packet)
Carol Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development"
Lawrence Blum, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory" (packet)

WEEK 9
George Sher, "Other Voices, Other Rooms? Women's Psychology and Moral Theory" (packet)
Nel Noddings, "An Ethic of Caring"
Rosemary Tong, "Criticisms of Nodding's Ethic of Caring"

WEEK 10  Other Alternatives to Traditional Ethical Theory
J.-P. Sartre, "Moral Choice Without Principles"
Dreyfus & Dreyfus, "What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Expertise" (packet)
Bernard Mayo, "Virtue and Moral Theory"