PHIL 105: Introduction to Ethics

Important Details:
Class meets: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 2:40-3:55PM in OU112

Your host: Prof. Michael P. Wolf
Office: 201 Humphrey House
Phone: 337-7077
E-mail: wolf@kzoo.edu

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 10:00-12:00 and by appointment

Required Texts
Tom Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*

There will also be a packet of readings, all of them required, available in class.

What Is This Course About?
My aim in this course is to make you do some philosophy. Just what it means to "do some philosophy" is a matter of some debate, though. If you asked twenty philosophers what it means to do philosophy, you would get somewhere between twenty-five and thirty answers. Just which questions are important, and just how we ought to pursue answers for them are not matters on which philosophers agree. The one element that seems to be common to all these conceptions of philosophy seems to be that we must give and ask for reasons for what we believe. We may judge that some reasons are better than others, and so some views may be more plausible to us. Giving and asking for reasons is a practice that belongs to all rational animals - Earthly or extraterrestrial, human or not - and this is what we will focus our attention on this course. The goal of this course is not to provide you with information (names, dates, and famous quotes) that you can recite at cocktail parties in the future, although in many cases, knowing those details is an important part of taking part in the class. Rather, my goal here is to teach you (or improve upon) a certain kind of skill: the skill of giving and asking for reasons, and evaluating the reasons other may give. If you cannot remember who John Stuart Mill or Martha Nussbaum is a year from now, but you can think more clearly about why you do and why should believe something, then the class will be a success.

Our actual topic this semester is the nature of moral knowledge, assuming there is such a thing. The course falls into three parts. In the first part, we will ask whether there are any objective truths about morality for us to consider. For there to be knowledge of something, there have to be facts about it for us to know. This is a difficult point, since many people believe that there are no moral facts it all comes down to my opinion vs. your opinion or my community vs. your community or some such arrangement. The early part of this course will be an attempt to motivate the view that there are some moral facts, even if not all the ones we once thought there were. That is, we will look at responses to the most straightforward forms of moral relativism. The second part of the course will be a look at four classical approaches to giving a moral theory. Can we really offer a small but powerful theory that accounts for all the moral facts we think there are? What is the status of facts that fall outside the purview of that theory, but which we still think are morally significant? Finally, we will close the semester by looking at some concrete issues in the theory of justice and ask how the work we have done can be brought to bear on them.

Assessment
Discussion will be an important part of how we run this class, and each member of the class should contribute something over the course of the semester. This is not to say that everyone must speak every day, nor that everyone has to offer some great insight every time they ask a question. The idea is to get you talking, shed your inhibitions about expressing an opinion, and get you accustomed to thinking about how someone might object or reply to what you have to say. To this end, I will assign a handful of short papers - a page at most,
something you could write over lunch before class - that will be due for the following class. I will give these assignments in class, I will collect them, and they will count towards your grade. So attendance is not counted towards your grade, but missing classes is likely to hurt you all the same. I will combine all of these factors into a class discussion grade, and it will count for $10\%$ of your final grade.

You will also have three 1400-1800 word papers to write over the course of the term on topics I will hand out to you in class. These are not meant to be research papers, they are meant to be arguments for a specific position in a particular debate. While you will not be penalized for going to the library and hunting down some additional sources, I believe this will tend to distract you from your real task, and I encourage you not to do it. There will be more information on how to write these papers and what will be expected over the course of the semester. The first of these papers will be worth $20\%$ of your final grade, and the second paper will be worth $30\%$ of your final grade.

The third and final paper will be due a week after classes end and it will count for $40\%$ of your final grade. The idea here is that you should take an issue related to the issues of justice raised towards the end of the course and apply it to some context from your own life or some current social situation in which we find ourselves. More information on this will be available later in the semester.

I also have a firm policy on late papers. I understand that life is full of mishaps and calamities and that these twists and turns in life's roads sometimes force you to complete work later than you planned. I am more than willing to hear such explanations and treat them accordingly. However, I also have too many students this year to be liberal with these extensions, so your reasons will have to be good ones personal tragedy or illness, for instance to be granted an extension. Extensions must also be requested in advance of the paper due date (i.e. don't come to me a week later without a paper and say, "I, uh broke my, uh spleen!"). Please note that having too much work to do at a particular point in the semester is NOT a reason for an extension, regardless of how much work may be involved. The paper topics will be available to you well in advance and you should budget your time accordingly. Papers are due on the stipulated date, in class. If there are printer problems, etc., I will accept them as late as 5:30 on that day. After that, they are late. You will be penalized a letter grade for every week that your paper is late and one step in grade (i.e. from an A- to a B+ or from a B to a B-) for every fraction of a week that it is late. So if your paper was due on Friday and you turned it in on Monday, you would drop one step. If you turned it in on the following Friday, it would drop a whole letter grade; the following Monday, a whole grade and a step (i.e. from an A to a B-).

I should mention a few things in closing. First, you are of course bound by the honor code here and any form of plagiarism will be severely punished. (Speak to me or consult a student handbook if you are unsure what counts as plagiarism.) This does not mean that you cannot use another source, or discuss and consult with your classmates about your assignments. I permit you to do the former and strongly encourage you to do the latter, so long as all the sources and classmates in question are properly cited in your paper. Finally, be forewarned that I reserve the right to lower the grades of papers given to me whose grammar and spelling do not meet college-level standards.

**Introduction to Ethics**

**Class 1. (September 18):** Introduction

**Class 2. (September 20):** Why Are We Doing Ethics?
Read Haugeland, "Heidegger On Being a Person" (from course readings).
Class 3. (September 22): Why Are We Doing Ethics?
Read Haugeland, "Heidegger On Being a Person" (from course readings).

Class 4. (September 25): What Is the Purpose of a Moral Theory?
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 1.

Class 5. (September 27): What Is the Purpose of a Moral Theory?
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 1.

Class 6. (September 29): Moral Relativism
Read Rorty, selections from Contingency, Irony and Solidarity.
(Recommended: (Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, and Rorty, Selections from Consequences of Pragmatism.)

Class 7. (October 2): Moral Relativism
Read Rorty, selections from Contingency, Irony and Solidarity.
(You might also see the Pepperdine and UMCP sites on relativism.)

Class 8. (October 4): Moral Realism
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 2. (Skip the section on egoism.)

Class 9. (October 6): Moral Realism
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 2. (Skip the section on egoism.)

Class 10. (October 9): Moral Realism
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 2. (Skip the section on egoism.)

Class 11. (October 11): A More Measured Realism?
Read Nussbaum, "Women and Cultural Universals" (from course readings).

Class 12. (October 13): A More Measured Realism?
Read Nussbaum, "Women and Cultural Universals" (from course readings).
(See also the IEP site on the Naturalistic Fallacy.)

Class 13. (October 16): Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 6
(See also the IEP site on Virtue Theory.)

First Paper Due October 16 - Click Here for Topics

Class 14. (October 18): Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 6

Class 15. (October 20): Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 6

Class 16. (October 23): Communitarian Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 7

Class 17. (October 25): Communitarian Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 7
Class 18. (October 27): Communitarian Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 7

Class 19. (October 30): Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4

Class 20. (November 1): Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4

Class 21. (November 3): Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4
(Mill's *Utilitarianism* is also available online.)

Class 22. (November 6): Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5
(See the IEP on Duty and Deontology and the Categorical Imperative.)

Second Paper Due November 6 - Click Here for Topics

Class 23. (November 8): Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5
(See the IEP site on Consequentialism site and the UWW site comparing Deontology and Consequentialism)

Class 24. (November 10): Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5

Class 25. (November 13): Do We Want a Theory At All?
Read Annette Baier, "Theory and Reflective Practices"

Class 26. (November 15): Do We Want a Theory At All?
Read Annette Baier, "Theory and Reflective Practices"

Class 27. (November 17): Do We Want a Theory At All?
Read Annette Baier, "Theory and Reflective Practices"

Class 28. (November 20): Questions of Justice
Read Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

Class 29. (November 22): Questions of Justice
Read Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

Third Paper Due November 29 - Click Here for Topics

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