PHIL 105: Introduction to Ethics

Important Details:
Class meets: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 1:15 - 2:30 PM 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 you 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 they 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**. Part of what I will look at in determining this is who contributes to the class discussion board, accessible through the College's web server. Follow the links for "Dr. Wolf's Board" and then look for the section devoted to this class. There will also be days set aside specifically for discussion where we will spend some time in smaller groups and then reconvene. Your attendance and participation will be expected on these days.

You will also have three 1500-2000 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. Each of these papers will be worth **30% of your final grade**. More information

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 24):** Introduction

**Class 2. (September 26):** Why Are We Doing Ethics? 
Read Haugeland, "Heidegger On Being a Person" (from course readings).  
(Recommended: A [Routledge](http://kzoo.edu/phil/ethics01D.html) article on Heidegger's life and work in PDF format. Long but rewarding.)
Class 3. (September 28): Why Are We Doing Ethics?
Read Haugeland, "Heidegger On Being a Person" (from course readings).

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

Class 5. (October 3): What Is the Purpose of a Moral Theory?
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 1.

Class 6. (October 5): 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 8): Moral Relativism
Read Rorty, selections from *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*.
(You might also see the IEP and UMCP sites on relativism.)

Class 8. (October 10): CLASS DISCUSSION
MORAL RELATIVISM

Class 9. (October 12): NO CLASS

Class 10. (October 15): Moral Realism
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 2. (Skip the section on egoism.)

Class 11. (October 17): A More Measured Realism?
Read Nussbaum, "Women and Cultural Universals" (from course readings).
(See also the IEP site on the Naturalistic Fallacy.)

Class 12. (October 19): CLASS DISCUSSION
MORAL REALISM AND WRITING A PHILOSOPHY PAPER
(Bring a rough draft to class.)

First Paper Due October 22 - Click here for topics

Class 14. (October 24): Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 6

Class 15. (October 26): Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 6

Class 16. (October 29): CLASS DISCUSSION
VIRTUE THEORY

Class 17. (October 31): Communitarian Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 7

Class 18. (November 2): Communitarian Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 7

**Class 19. (November 5):** Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4

**Class 20. (November 7):** Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4

**Class 21. (November 9):** Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4
(Mill's *Utilitarianism* is also available online.)

**Class 22. (November 12):** CLASS DISCUSSION
ARE THERE LIMITS TO CONSEQUENTIALISM

*Second Paper Due November 12 - Click here for topics*

**Class 23. (November 14):** Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5
(See the IEP on [Duty and Deontology](http://kzoo.edu/phil/ethics01D.html) and the [Categorical Imperative](http://kzoo.edu/phil/ethics01D.html).)

**Class 24. (November 16):** Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5
(See the IEP site on [Consequentialism](http://kzoo.edu/phil/ethics01D.html) site and the [UWW site](http://kzoo.edu/phil/ethics01D.html) comparing Deontology and Consequentialism)

**Class 25. (November 19):** Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5

**Class 26. (November 21):** CLASS DISCUSSION
DUTY AND CONSEQUENCES

**Class 27. (November 26):** Questions of Justice
Read Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

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

**Class 29. (November 30):** CLASS DISCUSSION
APPLYING ETHICS

*Third Paper Due December 3 - Click here for topics*