PHIL 105: Introduction to Ethics

Important Details:
Class meets: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 1:15 - 2:30 PM in Dewing 310.

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 and moral facts, assuming there are such things. We will begin by asking what it is for an action or a person to have a moral property or value and why communities feel compelled to consider such questions even when they do not agree on the details. The second part of the class will take us through a number of classical and contemporary views on moral facts and moral knowledge. Each of these will be accompanied by a look at some actual cases – torn from today’s headlines, as it were – that each theory will have to address. Days devoted entirely to class discussion will follow each of these subsections. Finally, you will be asked to prepare for your third and final assignment by doing a little research on a moral problem of some weight in your own community (either here at K College, or back at home, or even abroad if you have returned from study elsewhere). As we discuss the challenges of applying these moral ideas to public practice, your work will be incorporated into the ongoing discussion.

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 15% 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 note on the syllabus that specific dates are set aside for "class discussion". On these days, there will be no lecture and the class will break into smaller discussion groups that will address specific questions on the recent material. This is not a test per se - I will not put a letter grade on notes handed in - but it will count towards class participation and unexcused absence on these days will affect your grade.

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. The first of these papers will be worth 25% of your final grade and each of the remaining papers will be worth 30% of your final grade. The reason I add this minor wrinkle is that people are often writing their first philosophy papers in this class, and the first of three papers and the only way to figure what one is doing right or wrong is to simply try it. With this in mind, it seems more fair to have later work carry more weight.

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.) The policy of the philosophy department on this matter is to automatically fail a student on any plagiarized assignment and to submit their names for discipline under the College’s Honor Code. 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 23): Introduction
(Check here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Class 2. (September 25): Why Are We Doing Ethics?
Read Haugeland, "Heidegger On Being a Person" (from course readings).
Note that the online version of this is through a web service called JSTOR, and will only be available through computers that are connected to the KNET or RESNET.
(Recommended: IEP article on Heidegger's life and work. Long but rewarding.)

Class 3. (September 27): Why Are We Doing Ethics?
Read Haugeland, "Heidegger On Being a Person" (from course readings) and Beauchamp, Chapter 1.

Class 4. (September 30): What can we say to others about morality?
Read Rorty, selections from Contingency, Irony and Solidarity.
(Recommended: (Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, and Rorty, Selections from Consequences of Pragmatism.)
(Check here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Class 5. (October 2): What can we say to others about morality?
Read Rorty, selections from Contingency, Irony and Solidarity.
(Recommended: (Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, and Rorty, Selections from Consequences of Pragmatism.)

Class 6. (October 4): A More Measured Realism?
Read Nussbaum, "Women and Cultural Universals" (from course readings).
(See also the IEP site on the Naturalistic Fallacy.)

Class 7. (October 7): A More Measured Realism?
Read Nussbaum, "Women and Cultural Universals" (from course readings).
(Click here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Class 8. (October 9): CLASS DISCUSSION

Class 9. (October 11): Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4
(Mill's Utilitarianism is also available online.)

Class 10. (October 14): Consequentialist Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 4
(Check here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Class 11. (October 16): Applied Cases
Read class handouts

Class 12. (October 18): Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5
(See the IEP on Duty and Deontology and the Categorical Imperative.)

Class 13. (October 21): Deontological Theories
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 5
(See the IEP site on Consequentialism site and the UWW site comparing Deontology and Consequentialism)
(Click here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)
First Paper Due October 21 - Click here for topics

Class 14. (October 23): Applied Cases
Read class handouts

Class 15. (October 25): CLASS DISCUSSION

Class 16. (October 28): Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 6
(See also the IEP site on Virtue Theory .)
(Click here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Class 17. (October 30): Virtue Theory
Read Beauchamp, Chapter 6

Class 18. (November 1): Applied Cases
Read class handouts

Class 19. (November 4): Moral Particularism
Read Dancy selections from Moral Reasons
(See the Stanford site )
(Click here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Class 20. (November 6): Moral Particularism
Read Dancy selections from Moral Reasons

Class 21. (November 8): Applied Cases
Read class handouts

Class 22. (November 11): CLASS DISCUSSION
(Click here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Second Paper Due November 11 - Click here for topics

Class 23. (November 13): Rights and Liberties
Read Beauchamp Chapter 8

Class 24. (November 15): Questions of Justice
Read Beauchamp Chapter 9

Class 25. (November 18): Questions of Justice
Read Beauchamp Chapter 9
(Click here for this week's study questions in Word format or straight text.)

Class 26. (November 20): Applied Cases
Read class handouts
(Recommended: A Peter Singer article is available for those on KNET or RESENET.)

Class 27. (November 22): Applications
Read class handouts

Class 28. (November 25): CLASS DISCUSSION
Class 29. (November 27): CLASS DISCUSSION

Third Paper Due December 3 - Click here for topics