PHIL 105: Ethics
Syllabus

Fall 2003: MWF 1:15 - 2:30, Dewing Hall 103
Instructor: Dr. Ashley McDowell

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 10:30-12:00, Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00-12:00 (unless a change is announced)


Course Description
In this course, we will study the nature of morality and immorality. What makes an act, or a person, morally good? What reasons do we have for our answers to such questions? What do we mean by the terms "right" and "good"? Do we have good reasons to act morally? How do things like intentions, results, emotions, and rights fit into what is morally good? This course is about moral theory and "meta-theory," and thus concentrates on abstract issues about the nature of morality and moral concepts. It is not a course in applied ethics, although we will examine one debate in applied ethics - that over capital punishment - to help illustrate and apply the abstract theories we will be studying. We will first survey the work of some of the giants on whose shoulders contemporary ethicists stand - from Plato and Aristotle through Hume, Kant, and Mill. These philosophers constructed moral theories, which provide one way to answer the kinds of questions posed above.
In the second part of the course, we will cover the topic of the best place for ethical theories to be centered. We will work through a variety of ethical "isms" from early in the last century: intuitionism, emotivism, relativism, and egoism. These explore questions about whether morality comes from reasoning or looking within; whether morality is just an expression of taste; whether what is right is just what your society says is right; and whether being ethical is simply doing what is best for yourself. We then move on to some of the most current issues in contemporary ethics. Is a good act determined just by outcome? Is morality more about acts, or individuals and their characters?
In the last part of the course, we will cover some considerations brought up in contemporary ethics as things that might have been left out of traditional theories of ethics. What role should justice play in ethical theories? How do issues of individuals and their rights fit into morality? What light can feminism shed on the study of ethics, for centuries conducted largely by men? Can we be morally worse just by bad luck?
Throughout the course, you will be both learning about what others have said on these issues and developing your own views. We will be approaching other views - and our own - with respect and with a critical eye. The focus will be on providing and assessing arguments for positions, to try to come to the most thoughtful position possible on these questions. You will be tested on how well you have learned what these philosophers have thought, and their reasons and arguments. You will also be writing papers
in which you take and defend a stand on some aspect of the positions and arguments. To do so, you will learn about philosophical methods and concepts.

Class Format

This class will consist of a combination of lecture and discussion. Since philosophical learning is best done in an environment of discussion, attendance and participation are expected. You will be responsible for completing the readings before each class, and being prepared to discuss those readings. You should be aware that the readings in this course will most likely be quite challenging for you. We will be reading ten to twenty pages of historical pieces per day in Part One of the course, and a philosophical paper a day in Parts Two and Three. Give yourself plenty of time to do these readings carefully. Those who want to truly excel in this class will most likely want to read each assignment at least twice, and take notes on the readings.

In this class, we will be discussing issues that most people find important, and on which many people have strong opinions. We will not be merely exchanging opinions, but will be seeking the truth. In that spirit, everyone's contributions will be both respected and open to thoughtful criticism.

Course Requirements and Grading Scheme

Exams : 20% each
There will be a midterm exam in week 5 and a final exam. Both exams will be in essay and short-answer form, and the final exam will be cumulative, although focused on the material after the midterm.

Term paper: 25%
This is an 8-10 page paper with a mandatory rough draft. The topic will be one of your choice, but must be approved by me. The paper will be a critical philosophical paper, in which you carefully present material from your coursework and make an argument for a position you take on that material.

Reaction papers: 20%
There will be three short (2-3 page) reaction papers assigned in weeks 1-7. They will focus on different philosophical writing skills: the first on summary, the second on application of theories to a particular issue (capital punishment), and the third on criticism. They will be related directly to material being covered at the time in class.

In-class writing assignments and quizzes: 5%
Occasionally, I will give an unannounced short writing assignment (a paragraph or two) at the beginning of class, to check in on how well you are absorbing the readings. These will just be checked for basic comprehension. I may also give short unannounced quizzes, for the same purpose.

Ethics journal: 5%
I will ask you to keep an ethics journal, with one entry for each of weeks 1-9. Your entries should be at least a few sentences and at most two or three paragraphs in length, and will not be graded for quality of composition but for the sincerity of your attempt to do that week's journal entry requirement. This is not meant to be a time-consuming project, but one that gets you thinking about your connection to the course material for a few minutes each week. I will collect these entries each Friday, and you will turn in all nine entries on the Friday of week 9. I will not grade all of them. You should also be prepared to share your journal entry with the class; each Friday I will choose some students to present that week's journal entry for discussion. The assignments will vary, and will be announced in class and on the web site.

Participation, attendance, and class conduct: 5%
Attendance is expected: for each unexcused absence after two, your final grade will be reduced by a full grade.
Participation is also expected. In a philosophy class of this kind, discussion is absolutely essential, and may be the way you learn most about the material. I know that participation is difficult for some people, but you can consider this a safe place to practice contributing to a group discussion, which you will surely need to do throughout your life. I will require and ensure that conversation in class, although probably critical of ideas, will not be critical of people.

Your conduct in this class includes improvement and effort. It also includes issues of respectful behavior, such as tardiness, distracting behavior, or disrespectful behavior towards members of the class. We will go over this in class.

Assignment responsibilities
It is your responsibility to retain copies of all assignments you turn in, in a reliable format. Late assignments will be assessed a grade penalty of half a grade for each day late, except in the most extreme extenuating circumstances (for instance, severe illness). The formal requirements for all assignments will be announced in detail well ahead of time, both in class and on the website.

Grading scheme:

20% Midterm Exam
20% Final Exam
25% Term paper
20% Reaction papers
5% In-class writing assignments and quizzes
5% Ethics journal
5% Participation, attendance and class conduct

Academic integrity and the Honor System

"It is always important to think of the intellectual world as a community of mutual dependence, mutual helpfulness, mutual protectiveness, and common delight. We take ideas from others and we give them to others. We are indebted to others, and others are indebted to us. In sharing and acknowledging the community, we define ourselves more certainly as individuals. The ability to describe our sources is also an ability to define our own originality and our own selves. All communities depend on generosity, trust, definition, and the proper use of sources is part of the mortar that holds the community of the mind together."

- Richard Marius, Expository Writing Program, Harvard University

In this class, as in all classes at Kalamazoo College, we will be operating under the Honor System. It is important that you familiarize yourself with that system, and so I am attaching a copy of the College's statement of it. You should also familiarize yourself with proper procedures for collaborating, doing research, and citing sources. I expect each of you to visit my webpage and read the essay there called "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It." Should you have any questions about citations, plagiarism, or honor system issues, please visit or contact me.

Any assignment you turn in that I find to violate academic integrity, either through dishonesty, plagiarism, lack of appropriate citations, or unauthorized collaboration, will receive a grade of 0. Any further instance of a violation of academic integrity will be punished by a failing grade in the class as a minimum sanction.

Special needs
If you have any special needs that I can accommodate, please let me know as soon as possible.

Office hours
My office hours are posted above. They will be conducted on a first-come, first-served basis. You should
I feel absolutely free to come to them and discuss the course, the material, the assignments, or philosophy.

I request that each of you take a few minutes to visit me during my office hours sometime in the first week of classes. It will be an opportunity for us to chat one-on-one for the first time, and to get to know each other a bit more.

Schedule of Readings

This schedule is tentative, and will most likely be changed. Any changes will be announced in class and on the website. The reading assignments listed for each day must be completed before that class. All readings are found in your textbook.

Note: You are responsible for reading two additional articles by the end of week 3 (by Friday, 10/3):

van den Haag, "In Defense of the Death Penalty," pgs. 840 - 850
Bedau, "Capital Punishment," pgs. 850 - 860

PART ONE
Historical theories of ethics

WEEK ONE
M 9/22 Introduction

W 9/24 Plato
Euthyphro

F 9/26 Plato
The Republic:
Book II, 357a - 369a ("...in the form of the less.") (pgs. 65 - 73)
Book IV, 435a ("I proceeded therefore to ask..." - 445b ("...than lose heart.") (pgs. 88 - 96)
Book IX, 588b ("Well, then, I continued...") to end (pgs. 126-129)

WEEK TWO
M 9/29 Aristotle
Book I, pgs. 130 - 140

W 10/1 Aristotle
Books II and III, pgs. 140 - 153

F 10/3 Hume
Enquiry, Sections I - III, pgs. 261 - 274

WEEK THREE
M 10/6 Hume
Enquiry, Section V and Appendix I, pgs. 274 - 286

W 10/8 Kant
Pgs. 287 - 296

F 10/10 Kant
Second Section, pgs. 296 - 314

WEEK FOUR
M 10/13 Mill
Utilitarianism, Chapters I and II, pgs. 343 - 356
W 10/15 Mill
Utilitarianism, Chapters III - V, pgs. 356 - 376

F 10/17 Review and wrapup

WEEK FIVE
M 10/20 MIDTERM EXAM

PART TWO
Where is ethics centered - the self, society, or nowhere?

W 10/22 Intuitionism
Moore, Principia Ethica, pgs. 461 - 467

F 10/24 Intuitionism
Ross, "The Right and the Good," pgs. 477 - 486

WEEK SIX
M 10/27 Emotivism

W 10/29 Emotivism
Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," pgs. 493 - 503

F 10/31 Relativism
Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," pgs. 645 - 652

WEEK SEVEN
M 11/3 Egoism
Feinberg, "Psychological Egoism," pgs. 575 - 582

W 11/5 Utilitarianism
Brandt, "Some Merits of One Form of Rule Utilitarianism," pgs. 589 - 606

F 11/7 Utilitarianism
Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," pgs. 606 - 622

PAPER TOPIC PROPOSAL DUE BY SATURDAY 11/8 -
by email if submitting on Saturday

WEEK EIGHT
M 11/10 Virtue Ethics
MacIntyre, "After Virtue," pgs. 662 - 676

W 11/12 Virtue Ethics
Rachels, "The Ethics of Virtue," pgs. 693 - 704

PART THREE
Complications:
what important factors might have been forgotten in theories of ethics?

F 11/14 The Role of Justice
Rawls, A Theory of Justice (selections), pgs. 541 - 563
TERM PAPER ROUGH DRAFT DUE
WEEK NINE
M 11/17 The Role of Rights

W 11/19 Feminist Ethics
Held, "Reason, Gender and Moral Theory," pgs.677 - 692
TERM PAPER ROUGH DRAFT RETURNED

F 11/21 Moral Luck
Nagel, "Moral Luck," pgs. 726 - 737
COMPLETE ETHICS JOURNAL DUE

WEEK TEN
M 11/24 Review and wrapup
FINAL DRAFT OF TERM PAPER DUE

W 11/26 CLASS CANCELLED

Final exam: Thursday 12/4, 1:00 - 4:00