PHIL 105: Ethics  
Fall 2005  
Preliminary Syllabus

Fall 2004: MWF 2:40 - 3:55, Humphrey House lounge  
Instructor: Dr. Ashley McDowell

Office: 202 Humphrey House  
Office phone: 337-7077

Note: I will be sending announcements, handouts, assignments, and so forth to the class listserv. This listserv includes only your K email address, so make sure email sent there is forwarded to whatever email address you're likely to check frequently.


electronic reserves

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. To help us really see and feel the motivations and implications of all of these ideas, the main textbook we're using includes many passages from literature. Powerful literature and non-academic writing, such as in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Hugo's *Les Miserables*, or King's *I Have a Dream*, have the power to bring out our moral intuitions and test our moral ideas in ways that academic writing rarely can.

In the first section of the class, we will study the nature of morality, including its purpose, the existence of good and evil, and the question of whether morality is in the end "all relative". In Weeks 3 - 6, we'll be studying three prevalent types of ethical theories: attempts to provide comprehensive moral standards for what makes actions right and wrong, or persons good and bad. The theories focus, roughly, on well-being, duties, and virtues, respectively. We will read defenses, modifications, and criticisms of each type of theory, as well as literary passages guiding our thinking and intuitions.

Next, we will cover some specific moral issues that are particularly pressing. Why should we be moral - or do we only have reason to do what's best for ourselves? How important are freedom, autonomy, and self-respect, and how should those things fit into a moral theory?

As we go along, we will not just concentrate on moral theory in the abstract. We will also study ways to use philosophical theory in our lives. How, specifically, can these theories be applied to real-life situations? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What criteria do they offer for decision-making? The Harris book, *Applying Moral Theories*, will guide us on these issues with specific case studies to work on.

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. I will also be assessing how well you have integrated and gained mastery over the various source materials and their contributions to the overall issues. In addition, you will be writing essays 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. Perhaps most importantly, you will learn ways to systematize and reasonably think out your moral positions, as well as to discuss moral issues more productively and fairly with others.

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 some of the readings in this course will most likely be quite challenging for you. 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.
Assignments

(for policies on all assignments and on specific assignments, see “Policies” section below)

Participation, conduct, and low-intensity assignments:

Participation is 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. The rules for classroom civility and discourse (see below) will help make this an inviting place to contribute your voice.

I will keep general track of your contributions in class. Keep in mind that contributions can take various forms, including asking for clarification, participation in group work, and giving helpful examples. Keep in mind also that more does not necessarily mean better: those who excessively dominate discussions, speak disrespectfully, or otherwise use their voices in a negative way may be penalized for doing so. If you are in doubt, or if you are interested in advice about how to participate more effectively or more easily, ask me.

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. See the “policies” section below for more information.

The majority of this portion of your grade will be determined by your completion of various low-intensity assignments. You should expect one or two of these a week. These assignments will take various forms, with different purposes and grading criteria.

Graded homework assignments may include 1- to 2-page “response papers” on a specific topic relating to recent readings. The purpose of these is to integrate your academic learning of the material into your personal life and thinking, and to have the experience of constructing statements of your own reactions to the topics studied. They are meant to help you see the material as relevant to your life, and to see yourself as able to take a place in the ongoing debate about philosophical issues. I will grade these on the basis of how well I see you trying to do those things, not on the basis of your ability to regurgitate facts from the readings, or parrot back to me thoughts I or the philosophers studied have expressed.

Ungraded but required homework assignments may include things like an answer to a study question for a reading, a short “free writing” assignment responding to a reading, a brainstorming session for an upcoming paper or exam, some of your notes on the reading, one or more question on the reading, or outside material illustrating an important point in the readings or an application of them. These assignments serve a couple of purposes. Most importantly, they are designed to help you get more out of the material and progress more easily toward the course goals. For instance, “free writing” for a few minutes on a text you’ve just read can be a great way to absorb what you’ve read and become aware of your reaction to it (and what you did and didn’t get in it). This, in turn, can give the class great material to begin discussion of the reading during the next class. That leads to the second purpose ungraded assignments serve, which is to help me. They help me guide you, give the class something in common to use in our meetings, and help me see what you are understanding, thinking, focusing on, and wondering about. The assignments I will designate as ungraded are those I think it would be unfair and unhelpful to assign a grade to.

Graded and ungraded in-class assignments may include things like the above homework assignments, as well as one-minute papers, reading response mini-essays, summaries, concept maps, oral presentations such as summaries of the last class’s main points or presentations of homework, or speaking-intensive activities like role-plays or debates. These serve the same purposes as homework assignments, for you as individuals and as a class and for me. Again, I will decide which to grade based on fairness and helpfulness. Graded assignments will be graded based on criteria drawn from the expectations outlined above, in “What you can learn about and gain from this course” and “What I expect you to achieve.”

I will assign homework in class, and will send out the assignment over email as well. In rare cases I may assign a minimal homework project after the class before the project is due, in which case I will email you. For instance, I may email you asking you to send me a copy of one of your answers to the study questions for the next day’s readings. Please check your email 24 hours before each class meeting just in case. For all homework assignments, you must email a copy to me before class as well as bringing a hard copy with you to class.

Although ungraded assignments are ungraded, missing them has an adverse effect on your grade. For every two ungraded assignments missed, your “Participation, conduct, and miscellaneous assignments” grade will be reduced by half a grade (e.g., 85 to 80).

I will always let you know whether an assignment is a graded or ungraded one. If you are unclear on this, do not hesitate to ask!

Homework assignments must be emailed to me before the beginning of class on the day they are due; in addition, a hard copy must be brought to class (if a hard copy must also be turned in, I will let you know). See “Policies” section below for the penalties for late assignments. I strongly encourage you to do homework assignments on time, since their main purpose is
strongly tied to engaging with material in a precise way at a precise time.

In-class assignments missed because of a legitimate excuse (for instance, an official sports event) can be made up; it is your responsibility to see me and find out what you may have missed and arrange a make-up assignment.

Papers:

There will be 2-3 relatively long papers with specific and detailed sets of tasks to perform.

I will grade these papers based on several main areas of assessment. The most important thing is that they perform the goals they’re meant to perform adequately, but there are various aspects of a paper that make that happen. These include organization, accuracy, thoroughness, clarity, accessibility, depth of interpretation, success of illustration by example, and strength of reasons presented.

Group panel discussion:

In the course of the quarter, we will hold four panel discussions by groups whose members will have met and constructed a strategy for the sessions. These sessions will last half of a class period each, and each session will have a quarter of the class members in it. The panels will be divided in half, with half defending one position on an issue and the other half defending an opposing position – the issues and basic positions will be assigned, but many of the details will be worked out by the group members. Each group will read, in advance, one extra article that will not be read by the rest of the class.

These "debates" will function to help you grasp the differences between competitors on particular issues. It will give you an opportunity to construct reasoned arguments about the merits and deficiencies of opposing positions, and to consider possible objections and responses to those objections. Truly understanding a philosophical issue – or any issue – involves the possession of a thorough understanding of the underlying motivations, assumptions, commitments, and argumentative strategies of contrasting viewpoints. Furthermore, mastering the issue involves familiarity with the strengths and weaknesses of the two sides. Participating in and watching panel discussions like these can be truly broadening – oh, yeah, and fun, too.

Team members will evaluate their own and each other’s performance on the following dimensions: organization, acceptance of responsibility, initiative/motivation, creativity, task completion, attendance, collaboration, participation, attitude, independence, communication, and responsiveness. I will evaluate the discussions based on the following dimensions: appropriate incorporation of reading material, accuracy of representation of others’ views, clarity, quality of presentation of arguments, helpfulness of examples or illustrations (if any), overall mastery of the subject, depth of discussion, cooperation among team members, engagingness of presentation, success in getting the “audience” on board, organization, effectiveness, thoroughness, (appropriate) creativity or imagination, choice of most important aspects to focus on, handling of objections, division of labor.

Be aware that I may choose to videotape these panel discussions, for grading purposes only.

Final exam:

This will be a comprehensive examination, pulling together everything we will have done throughout the quarter. It will be an essay exam, with the tasks going deeper and involving more mastery than any of the assignments before. The questions will not merely ask you to present views or define terms. Rather, they will ask you to really show off the skills and abilities you’ve gained, as described above in “What you can learn about and gain from this course” and “What I expect you to achieve.” I may ask you to compare various approaches to solving common problems; predict how one view would respond to another; or integrate topics, theories, or problems. I may ask you to contrast various assumptions or principles. And I may have you do deeply engaged and personal type of things such as applying philosophical thinking to your own life or appraising and criticizing views definitively. These tasks are not necessarily more difficult than earlier tasks, but they engage your deeper understanding and absorption of the material. They are tasks that could only be performed by someone from the confident and competent position of having worked their way up to earning the privilege of analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating.

I will give you study materials before the exam, and hold a separate exam review session.

Policies

Attendance policy: Attendance is expected: three or more unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction for the course.
Absences will only be excused for required sports activities or practices or for a dire personal circumstance. Two late arrivals to class will be considered equivalent to one absence.

Assignment responsibilities:
- **You must turn in every assignment to me by email or Moodle before class.** If you email the assignment, the “subject” line must include your name and a unique name for the assignment (e.g., “Sept16 homework”) – I’ll probably tell you the name for each assignment as I give it. You can either attach the file or cut-and-paste it into the body of your email. If you use anything other than Microsoft Word, please submit by cut-and-paste rather than attachment. If you want to say anything else to me or ask me anything, send me a separate email with a different subject line!
- You must turn in every graded assignment to me in class, with your name on the back, written legibly. This is so no biases of mine interfere with my grading of your work.
- You must bring a hard copy of every ungraded assignment with you to class the day it is due. We may go over it in class, or I may have people read theirs, or other things might happen that you’ll want to have it for.
- Although ungraded assignments are ungraded, missing them has an adverse effect on your grade. **For every two ungraded assignments missed, your “Participation, conduct, and miscellaneous assignments” grade will be reduced by half a grade** (e.g., 85 to 80).
- In-class assignments missed because of a legitimate excuse (for instance, an official sports event) can be made up; it is your responsibility to see me and find out what you may have missed and arrange a make-up assignment.
- When you turn in your paper, you must turn in a copy of a rough draft and an outline of the paper (with your name written on the back of each). I cannot recommend outlining and revising philosophy papers enough, and so I want to make absolutely sure you’re doing both. An outline also sometimes helps me understand the intentions of your paper better.
- Your paper will be subject to the following policy regarding Edited Standard Written English (ESWE). Your final draft must have no more than an average of two departures from ESWE per page, in any combination of various areas to be delineated beforehand (e.g., nontrivial grammatical errors, punctuation errors, misuse of apostrophes or quotation marks, misspellings or typos). I will provide you with a list of resources for working on ESWE as I will for working on the content of your paper. I also encourage you to visit the Writing Center to review your paper. Any paper that fails this ESWE gateway criteria policy will be assessed a grade of F. If this happens to you, you will have an opportunity to revise the paper for resubmission with a penalty of half a grade (e.g., 90 to 85).

**Late assignment policy:** A copy of each of your assignments is due by email before class on the day that it is due. For papers and graded assignments, a hard copy must also be turned in during class (you must bring hard copies of ungraded assignments with you to class also; I may ask for them as well).

**An assignment that is between one hour and 24 hours late will receive a ½ grade reduction. An assignment that is between one day and two weeks late will receive a full grade reduction. Assignments will not be accepted more than two weeks late.**

You will be permitted one “freebie”: an assignment turned in as much as two days late, no questions asked, as long as you let me know you’re taking your freebie. Be mindful not to use it lightly. **When you turn in your “freebie,” have me mark it as such.** If you are turning it in at my office, write “freebie” conspicuously on it.

**Changing grades:** if you feel you have been assigned a grade unfairly or inaccurately, you should by all means talk to me about it. My only requirement is that you prepare an argument (a set of reasons and facts) before you do so.

**Rules of civility and discourse**
In this course, you will be expected to behave like what I’m sure you are – a civil person interested in entering into an atmosphere that is maintained to be courteous and respectful. Just so that my expectations are clear, let me express some specific guidelines. In order to create a smooth and harmonious learning community,
- take care not to disrupt class; please
  - wait until class is over to pack up
  - turn off cell phones
  - do not look at any material other than class material
  - stay awake during class
  - arrive on time
    § if you must arrive late, please
      - take a seat quietly near the door
      - see me after class to record your lateness, so I do not record you absent
    § Note: two late arrivals to class will be considered the equivalent of one absence.

- to allow everyone to stay focused on the class lecture or discussion,
  - only one person at a time in the class should be speaking. Side conversations are distracting for surrounding students and for me.

- to ensure the best possible environment for discussion, please
  - no "hogging the floor"
  - no blaming or shaming
  - no personal attacks
  - always respect the confidentiality of the classroom
  - keep your contributions aimed at our common goals: discovery, progress, and learning, not winning, making the "other side" look bad, or getting attention.
    § If you violate one of these discussion rules, I will likely point it out to you in class or afterwards.
    § If you think someone else is violating one of these discussion rules, I encourage you to raise the issue (without blaming, shaming, or personal attack!)

**Academic Integrity**

"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. 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" (http://kzoo.edu/~mcdowell/Academic_integrity_and_plagiarism.htm). 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.[1]

**Recommendations for gaining the most you can from this course**
A note on reading: don’t succumb to the misconception that in order to read something you only have to move your eyes over the lines, or “read it out loud in your head,” so to speak. What I expect is that you will read the material in a more sophisticated way, thinking as you go. You should be asking yourself the main points, making sure you understand the structure of the reading, thinking about how this reading relates to others you’ve done, and otherwise working to comprehend the material, not just to complete a technical “reading” of it. You might try highlighting, underlining, making marginal notes, or outlining – whatever helps you focus and understand. For many people, reading both before and after the lecture makes it much easier to understand the material. If you don’t want to read the whole selection again, at least skim it after you’ve heard about it; it will help it sink in. It probably saves time over trying to understand it weeks later before the exam if you didn’t do enough to really comprehend it at the time it was being taught.

Reading tips: When I construct study questions for readings, here are some of the questions I’m always tempted to include. Ask them of yourself when you do readings (especially academic papers).

1. What was the main thing the author wanted me to walk away with in this reading?
2. How does this reading fit in with the ones just before it?
3. How does this reading fit in with the class as a whole?
4. Can I understand this author’s points using examples from my own experience?
5. What’s motivating this author to think or reason as she does?
6. What did I find especially cool, admirable, or smart in this reading?
7. What did I find confusing or hard to get in this reading?
8. What struck me as right, wise, or reasonable in this reading?
9. What struck me as wrong, misguided, or unreasonable in this reading?

More class tips:
- talk to other people about what you’re studying.
Organize a study group; go to coffee hours; corral your roommate and make him or her hang out and talk some philosophy with you. Doing philosophy out loud helps you learn it much better.
- make good notes.
Not just in class, which is essential, but it can also help to take notes on what you read. If you’re having to sum up what you’ve read in a few phrases, you’re having to pay attention and make yourself get the gist of the reading. Try to take good notes in class – what seems clear at the time can be baffling or fade away after a little time.
- explain philosophical ideas to someone else.
You know that you really understand something if you can explain it to someone else. If you can’t find someone to try to explain an argument or theory to, pretend. Use a dog, mirror or wall and act like it just offered you a million dollars to explain this philosophical concept in your own words (hey, it could happen!).
- on assignments, learn to explain your answers.
The shortest answer is almost never the best one on an essay philosophy test or paper. You will usually be expected to say something about what makes that the right answer, even if it’s a matter of fact. For example, if you’re asked to reconstruct an argument that you’ve studied, remember to define philosophical terms and make sure each point is getting across loud and clear. This may mean saying the same thing in more than one way – that’s okay as long as you’re not just saying it over and over to fill space. Think of yourself as telling the reader why the answer you’ve given is the right answer; what it is about it that makes it right.
- do your best to see what’s good about each view.
Even if your gut is telling you a philosophical theory is dead wrong, you’ll understand it better if you try to figure out why someone might think it’s right. Then you can do a better job of deciding what’s wrong about it. You could pretend that you really want this theory or argument to be right – that it’s your mom’s great idea or if it were right world peace would happen. Whatever – before you knock an idea make sure you’ve tried it out thoroughly.
- try to make it real to yourself.
Think about how a philosophical issue might apply to your interests or your life. Imagine situations where the answer to a philosophical question matters. Make up your own examples to test theories. Use your creative and imaginative abilities to try to engage the topic, and you’ll find it more fun than if you think of it as memorization. And what’s more fun is easier to learn.
A note on criticism and respect

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. We will be approaching other views — and our own — with an open-minded but 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. Be careful not to take it personally if a view that you put forward is criticized; this is helpful if what we’re after is really solving the problems.

Resources

First, I recommend you visit the library’s philosophy research guide, at http://www.kzoo.edu/is/library/depts/phil/index.html

Some especially recommended links:

A philosophical glossary for beginners: http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/vocab/glossary.html

Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://www.rep.routledge.com/ (can reach through library website, “databases and indexes”)

Philosophical dictionary: http://www.philosophypages.com/dy/

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://plato.stanford.edu/

Guide to Philosophy on the Internet: http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/phillinks.htm


Taking Notes on Philosophical Texts: http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/courses/notes.htm

Ethics Updates: guide to ethics on the internet: http://ethics.acusd.edu/index.html

Guide to Grammar and Style, with links: http://newark.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/


Special needs

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

Tentative Schedule of Readings

This schedule is tentative. Any changes will be announced in class and on the website. The reading assignments listed for each day must be completed before that class.

WEEK ONE
M Introduction

W What Is the Purpose of Morality?
TML, Chapter 1
Harris, Ch. 1

F Good and Evil
TML, Chapter 2 pages 54 - 107

WEEK TWO
M Good and Evil
TML, Chapter 2 pages 108 - 153

W Is Everything Relative?
TML, Chapter 3 pages 155 - 191
Harris Ch. 2
F Is Everything Relative?
TML, Chapter 3 pages 191 - 222

WEEK THREE
M Objectivist Theories
Harris Ch. 3

W Moral Theories
Harris Ch. 4

F Applying the Ethics of Natural Law
Harris Ch. 6

WEEK FOUR
M Utilitarianism: Bentham and Nielsen
TML, Chapter 4 pages 227 - 252

W Utilitarianism: Mill
Mill, Utilitarianism Chapters I and II

F Utilitarianism: Mill
Mill, Utilitarianism Chapters III and IV

WEEK FIVE
M Utilitarianism: Williams, LeGuin, Huxley
TML, Chapter 4 pages 252 - 293

W Applying Utilitarianism
Harris Ch. 7

F Deontology: Kant
TML, Chapter 5 pages 295 - 316

WEEK SIX
M Deontology: duties
TML, Chapter 5 pages 317 - 336

W Deontology
TML, Chapter 5 pages 337 - 370

F Applying the Ethics of Respect for Persons
Harris Ch. 8

WEEK SEVEN
M Religion and Ethics
TML, Chapter 5 pages 370 - 373 (Plato)
Weston (reserve)

W Virtue Theory
TML, Chapter 6 pages 388 - 423 (Hugo and Aristotle)

F Virtue Theory
TML, Chapter 6 pages 423 - 457 (Mayo, Hawthorne, Frankena)

WEEK EIGHT
M Applying Virtue Theory
Harris Ch. 9

W Ethics and Egoism: Glaucos's Challenge
TML, Chapter 8 pages 559 - 569

F Ethics and Egoism: Rand
TML, Chapter 8 pages 569 - 579

WEEK NINE
M Ethics and Egoism: criticisms
TML, Chapter 8 pages 580 - 602 (Pojman and Rachels)

W Applying Egoism
Harris Ch. 5

WEEK TEN
M Freedom, Autonomy, and Self-Respect
TML, Chapter 10 pages 648 - 665 (King and Angelou)
Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (online: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/White/anthology/wright.html)

W Freedom, Autonomy, and Self-Respect: psychology and autonomy
TML, Chapter 10 pages 666 - 680 (Milgram)
Denise Cummins, "Minds in Groups:何 Others Influence Our Behavior" (reserve)