PHIL 105: Ethics  
Fall 2006  
Syllabus

MWF 2:40 - 3:55  
Dewing 210

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>and by appointment</td>
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Texts and readings:

Pojman, *How Should We Live?* (referred to here as "HSWL")
Pojman, *The Moral Life: An Introductory Reader in Ethics and Literature* (2nd ed.) (referred to here as "TML")
electronic reserves or online texts as announced

Note on Moodle: this course website will include lots of information - go to http://moodle.kzoo.edu/moodle/, find our course, and get yourself logged on.

Note on email: I will be sending mail to the class alias, which only knows your K email address. Make sure your K email is forwarded to whatever email account you use regularly, if it's something else.

What this course is about

In this course, we will study the nature of ethical good and bad. 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 ethically? How do things like intentions, results, emotions, and rights fit into what is ethically good? This course is about ethical theory and "meta-theory," and thus concentrates on abstract issues about the nature of ethics and ethical 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 ethics, including its purpose, the existence of good and evil, and the question of whether ethics is in the end "all relative," or really all about what's best for oneself, or the same as one's religion. Afterwards, 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. We will read defenses, modifications, and criticisms of each type of theory, as well as literary passages guiding our thinking and intuitions. Finally, we will cover issues surrounding freedom, autonomy, and self-respect, including an examination of how our psychology can lead us into evil or good.
Throughout the course, you will be 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 taking your own stands on some aspects of the positions and arguments. To do all of this, you will learn about philosophical methods and concepts. Perhaps most importantly, you will learn ways to systematize and reasonably think out your ethical positions, as well as to discuss ethical issues more productively and fairly with others.

What you can learn about and gain from this course

Unless you have plans to become a professional philosopher, the most important things you will gain from this course will not be detailed retention of specific philosophical positions. Rather, you should hope and strive to gain abilities in three main areas:

**Theoretical learning:**
- appreciation of ethical issues and their importance, and the ability to recognize ethical problems and considerations in many contexts.
- the ability to recall, articulate and apply various approaches to moral problems, and to appraise for yourself the routes for dealing with important moral issues

**Practical learning:**
- the ability to reproduce and compare various approaches to solving common human problems that have ethical dimensions.
- applying ethical thinking to the "real world" - to everyday living, to specific problems and puzzles, to social issues, to challenges in your career, and so forth.

**Philosophical methodology:** These skills fall into three main sub-areas:

*Critical thinking and problem solving*
- extracting the main points from difficult material, following and reconstructing arguments, and thinking questions through.
- learning to analyze and solve problems, considering them from many points of view and assessing the pros and cons of different proposals.

*Communication*
- learning to express yourself clearly and persuasively.
- skills in making decisions and then justifying your position in a clear, logical, and compelling way.

*Creativity, research, and investigation*
- proficiency at conducting investigations - learning to ask the right questions, and to develop and assess methods and standards for answering those questions.
- solving problems using careful but innovative techniques and basing your conclusions on reliable evidence

What I expect you to achieve

As the course goes on, I will expect different things out of you in terms of mastery and achievement. At first, assignments will be designed to help you gain skills in understanding basic philosophical and ethical concepts and their significance. You will learn about various theories, principles, and tools, and learn how to apply all those things for yourself on cases and issues.

As we study specific philosophical theories and problems, I will expect you not just to understand the tools, but see how philosophical thinking plays out in rigorous argumentation on particular issues of importance. You should aim for grasping the issues the philosophers are trying to resolve, and comprehending the differences between approaches and their advantages and disadvantages. By the end of the course, I will
expect you to be pulling everything together. You will be able to evaluate others’ positions and arguments, assess their strengths, and select a reasoned response, whether that involves formulating an original position, reaching compromise, or reaching a deeper understanding. I will expect you to end up able to locate yourself in the world of philosophical and ethical concerns, becoming a practitioner rather than a passive regurgitator.

Structure of class

Classes will consist of a mixture of lecture, discussion, and in-class work, either individual or in groups. We will go over readings and assignments due for each day. I will expect you to have done the reading, thoroughly, before class (I'll post recommendations for how to do this on the Moodle site). Be prepared to share anything you were to have prepared for each day with the class or groups. Class time will not be spent merely repeating in lecture format what the readings have already said, although I will of course need to explain some things from the readings. I will generally assume that you have understood the material adequately, unless you indicate otherwise. I welcome questions, as they are one of the only ways for me to know what is unclear to you.

You must bring with you to class whatever texts we are working on for that day, as well as two copies of any assignment you are to have completed for that day (one to turn in and one to use).

Interaction outside of class

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

I encourage each of you to take a few minutes to visit me during my office hours sometime in the first week or two 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.

Email: Feel free to email me with questions; be aware I am less likely to answer email on the weekend than during the week.

Moodle: This site is a great place to find information you need. I also may initiate discussion threads and other interactive possibilities on the Moodle site.

Assignments

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

Day-to-day assignments: 25%
Exam on introductory and background ethical material (week 5): 25%
Exam on utilitarianism and deontological ethics (week 8): 25%
Oral final exam connecting issue of your choice to course material (exam week): 25%

Participation and conduct: no official percentage, but matters at grade time

Participation and conduct:

Participation will not carry any official weight in your grade, but it is expected, and can make a difference one way or the other in borderline cases at final grade time. In a philosophy class of this kind, discussion is absolutely essential, and is likely to 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. I expect that we will get to know each other well enough to feel comfortable talking relatively quickly. I also intend to make it apparent that you will not
be thought worse of for saying anything, as long as you are speaking respectfully. The guidelines 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.

**Day-to-day assignments (25%):**

You should expect several in-class and/or out-of-class assignments a week, depending on what else we've got going on that week. They will mostly be relatively undemanding, acting as supplements to your reading and studying rather than significantly additional work. I will simply check these to make sure you worked on them adequately - I won't be assigning them grades, or (usually) making comments on them. Each one you do satisfactorily counts as a grade of 95 - a solid "A". If there is something seriously wrong with the assignment (for instance, you only complete part of it, do it egregiously differently than I asked you to, or demonstrate very little effort), I will give the assignment either partial credit (essentially, a grade of 70 - a "C-") or no credit. If the assignment is done extraordinarily well, I will give it extra credit (a grade of 100). See the "policies" section below for more information, like policies on late or missed assignments. I will assign homework in class, and will often send out the assignment over email and on the Moodle site as well.

Homework assignments may include 1- to 2-page "response papers" on a specific topic relating to recent readings, answers to study questions 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, or outside material illustrating something useful. 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. They also 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.

In-class activities may include things like the above homework assignments but done in class, 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 group work. These serve the same purposes as homework assignments, for you as individuals and as a class and for me.

**Two in-class exams (25% each):**

There will be two in-class exams in this course: one in week 4, and the other in week 8. The second exam will be on utilitarianism and deontological ethics, and will not cover the material represented on the first exam. Each exam may include various types of questions, including true/false or multiple choice, short answers, identification and explanation of significance of quotations, and essays.

**Final oral exam (25%):**

Around week 4 or 5, you will be choosing a specific issue on which to focus for the final exam in this class, which will be an individual, half-hour long oral examination with me during exam week. You should be thinking about your issue as we move through the material in the second half of the class, and I highly
recommend you keep a journal or file of some kind to record your thoughts and work relating to the issue. I will give you some suggestions, but it should be something you are particularly interested in thinking more about. Some examples might be animal rights, capital punishment, gay marriage, preemptive war, assisted suicide, performance enhancers in athletics or academics, drug legalization, evolution vs. creationism/intelligent design in public schools - you get the idea. You could also choose something very specific, like whether your roommate should have done that thing he did, or whether that politician should have voted that way, or whatever.

The oral exam will not be "open-note," but you will turn in to me whatever notes, outlines, or writing you have accumulated in the process of preparing for the exam. In addition, you will be permitted to have two things to refer to during the meeting: a notecard with a few notes (up to 50 words or so), which you will turn in at the end, and a copy of the schedule of readings for the course.

In our meeting, I will ask you questions that will relate your topic or issue to various aspects of the class. This will be a comprehensive examination, pulling together everything we will have done throughout the quarter. The tasks will go deeper and involve 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." You should think of it as an opportunity to show off what you have really learned how to do with the material we've gone over. The format will not be you being "drilled" or critically probed; rather, it will be more like a conversation. I will ask you questions, then follow up on your answers to clarify or probe the depth of your understanding and thought. It allows you to get immediate feedback on what needs clarifying in your answers, and gives you a chance to experience a type of interaction common in advanced academic settings.

Each student's exam will be different, since the topics will vary and I may pull from anything in the course to ask you about. I may ask you to compare various approaches to solving problems within your topic; predict how one view would respond to another on the issue; or integrate different views as they might relate to your issue. I may ask you to contrast various assumptions or principles. 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 go over this exam in more detail as the quarter goes on, and will be available to meet with you to prepare for it beforehand.

**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 for a dire personal circumstance.

**Assignment responsibilities:**
§ If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out if something was assigned. Get the phone number and email address of at least one other person in class.
§ For all homework assignments, bring two hard copies with you to class (one to hand in and one to use).
§ You can miss up to three day-to-day assignments (either in-class or out-of-class).

**Late assignment policy:** You will be permitted three "freebie" late days to use as you will (all three days on one assignment turned in three days late, or three assignments turned in one day late each, or two and one). Be mindful not to use these lightly. After your freebies are used up, no late assignments will be accepted. When you turn something in...
using a freebie, have me mark it as suChapter If you are turning it in at my office, write "freebie" conspicuously on it.

§ 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.

§ If you turn in an assignment late, by email (this is only possible with my permission), or in any other way that makes it differently turned in from those of the rest of the class members, you should not expect to get it back at the same time as everyone else.

**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. I expect you to 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. By the way, don't forget to read the footnotes or endnotes as well as the main text in your readings; and to read any reflections, introductions, and review questions that directly accompany the readings.

**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.

**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, and with proper procedures for collaborating, doing research, and citing sources. I expect each of you to read the essay on the Moodle site called "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It". If you have any questions, feel free to see 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.**

**Guidelines for civility and discourse**

In this course, you will be expected to behave like what 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
o wait until class is over to pack up
o turn off cell phones
o do not look at any material other than class material
o stay awake during class
o arrive on time
§ if you must arrive late, please take a seat quietly near the door, and see me after class to record your lateness, so I do not record you absent.
- to allow everyone to stay focused on the class lecture or discussion,
  o 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
  o no "hogging the floor"
  o no blaming or shaming
  o no personal attacks
  o always respect the confidentiality of the classroom
  o 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!)

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. 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.

Schedule of Readings

Any changes in this schedule will be announced in class and on the Moodle site. The reading assignments listed for each day must be completed before that class.

WEEK ONE

Monday: Introduction

Wednesday: What Is the Purpose of Morality?
TML Chapter 1 pgs. 7-31 and 41-52 (Golding, Hobbes)
HSWL "A Word to the Student," pgs. xiv-xvi, and Chapter 1

Friday: Good and Evil
TML Chapter 2 pages 54 - 92 (Melville, Dostoevsky, Styron)
(not assigned, but good if you're interested: Bales, p. 83-92)

WEEK TWO

Monday: Good and Evil
TML Chapter 2 pages 93 - 127 (Hallie, Benn)

Wednesday: Why be Moral? Is the Good Good for You?
TML Chapter 8 pgs. 559-569 (Plato)
HSWL Chapter 2 pgs. 19-24

Friday: Group exercise day

WEEK THREE

Monday: Why be Moral? Egoism and Altruism
HSWL Chapter 2 pgs. 24-43
TML Chapter 8 pgs. 588-602 (Rachels)
(not assigned, but good if you're interested: Nietzsche (TML 127-140), Rand (TML 569-579), Pojman (TML 580-588))

Wednesday: Is Everything Relative?
TML Chapter 3 pages 155 - 165 (Benedict)
HSWL Chapter 3
(not assigned, but good if you're interested: Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy or Stanford Encyclopedia entry on moral relativism)

Friday: Is Everything Relative?
TML Chapter 3 pages 191 - 222 (Elshtain, Ibsen)

WEEK FOUR

Monday: The Case for Ethical Objectivism
HSWL Chapter 4

Wednesday: Religion and Ethics
HSWL Chapter 5

Friday: EXAM 1

WEEK FIVE

Monday: Utilitarianism: Mill

Wednesday: Utilitarianism: Mill

Friday: Utilitarianism
HSWL Chapter 6 pages 107-119
TML Chapter 4 pages 237-252 (Nielsen)

WEEK SIX

Monday: Utilitarianism
TML Chapter 4 pages 252 - 271 (Williams, LeGuin)
Wednesday: Utilitarianism
TML Chapter 4 pages 272-293 (Huxley)
HSWL Chapter 6 pages 120-134

Friday: Deontological Ethics
HSWL Chapter 7 pages 137-142
TML Chapter 5 pages 317 - 339 (Ross, MacIver, Whately)

WEEK SEVEN

Monday: Deontology: Kant
HSWL Chapter 7 pages 142-149

Wednesday: Deontology: Kant
TML Chapter 5 pages 306-313 (Kant)
HSWL Chapter 7 pages 149-153

Friday: Deontology: Kant
TML Chapter 5 pages 314-316 (Kant)
HSWL Chapter 7 pages 154-157

WEEK EIGHT

Monday: Deontological Ethics
TML Chapter 5 pages 340 - 370 (Bierce, Fried, Glaspell)
HSWL Chapter 7 pages 157-159

Wednesday: EXAM 2

Friday: Virtue Theory
TML Chapter 6 pages 388-407 (Hugo)
HSWL Chapter 8 pages 165-172

WEEK NINE

Monday: Virtue Theory
TML Chapter 6 pages 407-423 (Aristotle)

Wednesday: Virtue Theory
HSWL Chapter 8 pages 172-174
TML Chapter 6 pages 423 - 446 (Mayo, Hawthorne)

Friday: Virtue Theory
TML Chapter 6 pages 447-457 (Frankena)
HSWL Chapter 8 pages 174-188

WEEK TEN

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

Wednesday: Freedom, Autonomy, and Self-Respect
Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (online: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/White/anthology/wright.html)
TML Chapter 10 pages 648-665 (King, Angelou)
(recommended, but not assigned: TML Chapter 10 pages 691-702 and 719-725 (Hill, Vonnegut))