100-25 Ethics as an Introduction to Philosophy

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Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy

By exploring different philosophical approaches to basic ethical questions, we will engage in ethical analysis of a variety of issues connected to the central theme of justice. The purpose of this exploration is not primarily to introduce you to what others have said but rather to encourage you to face these questions seriously yourself.

Course Goals: As a result of this class, I hope you will

• Become interested in engaging some of the fundamental questions about ethics that are part of the question of how we should live.
• Become better readers by interpreting important texts by philosophers on ethics, identifying major arguments and fundamental principles in those texts.
• Become better writers by organizing your thoughts on complex issues in class discussion and in regular formal and informal writing assignments.

Course Outcomes: As a result of this class, students should be able to:

• Articulate some of the fundamental questions about ethics.
• Explain different alternatives for answering some fundamental questions about ethics.
• Evaluate different alternatives for answering some fundamental questions about ethics.
• Explain a philosophical argument, analysing the fundamental principles on which it relies and the evidence it offers.
• Read a primary text in philosophy, identifying major arguments and fundamental principles in that text.
• Write an argumentative essay, formulating and defending a thesis about an important topic in ethics.

As the foundational philosophy course in the Ethics/Religion and Society focus, this course fulfills an E/RS requirement and a required course in philosophy. This course will help students achieve the following from the provisional student learning outcomes for the Core Curriculum:

• Organize and express their ideas in writing.
• Formulate clear and arguable theses, supported by evidence.
• Analyze and interpret philosophical texts.
• Evaluate the strength of an argument.
• Discuss fundamental questions that arise from the human condition, such as questions about the grounds of morality.
• Articulate and engage with great ideas in the history of Western thought.
• Analyze rationally competing claims about individual and political justice within foundational philosophical texts.
**Texts:**
Plato, *Republic*
Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*

**Grading:**
- Participation 15%
- Journal 20%
- Writing Assignments 15%
- Term Paper 25%
- Final exam 25%

**Participation:** This is primarily a discussion class, which means that I expect students to be active participants in the course.
- This grade will reflect how actively you contribute to the class. You can improve your grade by asking questions in class, on the discussion board, in my office hours, or by email. Sleeping, texting, or doing work for other classes will lower your grade.
- Laptops, phones, and other similar devices must be turned off, unless I have approved them in advance. Repeated violations will not only lower your participation grade but may result in a penalty for missing class.

**Journal:** You will maintain a journal this semester, which will require you to reflect on the weekly reading assignments and on the arguments we discuss in class. Each week’s post will be graded full credit (1 points), half credit (0.5 points) or no credit (0 points). Your grade will be determined by the percentage of the posts for which you receive full credit (90%=A, 80%=B, 70%=C, etc; half credit on two posts equals full credit on one).

NOTE: Posts will be due by the beginning of class on Tuesday each week and will not be accepted late. If you miss a post, you can make up the points by doing extra credit:
- Part A, one-half point extra credit: Post your reading notes for the week.
- Part B, one-half point extra credit: Post an additional journal entry for the week, reflecting on class discussion.

For more details about the assignments and grading, see the “Journal” handout.

**Writing Assignments:** You will have four scheduled writing assignments, each of which will ask you to practice an element of writing a philosophy paper. These four assignments will then prepare you for the work of writing the term paper at the end of the semester. In addition to the scheduled writing assignments, you will have regular informal assignments, and your average on these will count as the equivalent of one scheduled writing assignment.

**Term Paper:** You will write one full paper, which will require you to explain an argument concerning one of the fundamental ethical questions we have discussed in class. Specifics will be given at least a week before the paper is due.

**Final Exam:** Your final will be an in-class cumulative exam, which will require you to explain arguments discussed in class. Specifics will be given at least a week before the exam.
COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: While you are expected to keep up with the reading at home, much of the work of the course takes place in the classroom, which means it is important that you are in class.

- If you miss class 1-4 times: For each absence, you will lose 0.5 points (on a 100 point scale) from your final grade.
- If you miss class 5-8 times: For each absence after the first four, you will lose a grade from your final grade in the course (e.g. from a B to a B-).
- The penalty applies regardless of whether your absence is excused. You can, however, avoid the penalty by turning in the make-up work:
  - Get notes from another student for the day(s) you missed and summarize them, explaining the three or four most important ideas covered on the day you missed.
  - Include questions that you have after reading those notes, along with questions you had about the reading for the week that were not answered in those notes.
  - NOTE: This summary should show you have read and thought about the notes you got. Simply copying another student’s class notes is not sufficient.
  - Type up your summary and turn in a hard copy, along with a xerox copy of the notes you borrowed, at the beginning of the class after your first class back.
- If you miss more than 8 classes: You will automatically fail the course.
- If you are regularly late to class: For every three times you are late, you will lose 0.5 points from your final grade. Make-up work will not erase this penalty.

Late/missed work:

- Writing assignments must be submitted on-line by the beginning of class on the day indicated. Term papers must be submitted on-line by midnight on the day indicated. Writing assignments and papers will lose a grade (e.g. from a B to B-) for each day late; weekends count as a single day.
- Weekly journal posts are due by the beginning of class each Tuesday, on the reading we will discuss that week. I will not accept these posts late, but you can do extra credit to make up for a missed post. (See handout on Journals).
- Reflection journal posts are due by midnight on the day indicated. Late posts will receive half credit.
- Technical problems are not an adequate excuse for submitting work late. Submit your work early enough that you have time to address any technical problems that come up.
- Since most of your work will be submitted electronically, it is your responsibility to ensure that it has been submitted correctly. You will receive a receipt from Turnitin.com for anything submitted there.

Plagiarism: You will be expected to follow the policy for academic honesty as outlined in the Xavier University Catalog. Violation of this policy will result in an F on the assignment. A second violation of this policy will result in an F for the course.

- All papers will be submitted to turnitin.com, a service that checks papers against those on the web and in its database. If you have any questions or concerns, please see me.
- Working with other students does not constitute plagiarism, but copying another student’s work does. If you work with your classmates or with other students who have taken my class in the past, be sure anything you turn in is written in your own words.
- Consulting a website such as Sparknotes does not constitute plagiarism. Cutting and pasting from a website, however, is plagiarism, even if you rephrase occasional passages. Any time you use someone else’s words, you must provide an adequate citation.
Course Schedule

NB: The regular weekly journal post will be due 5 minutes before class each Tuesday, unless a change is announced for a particular week.

Week 1: Aug 27, 29  Introduction  Aug. 30  Journal post, Argument

Week 2: Sep. 3, 5  Republic 2: 357a-362c (SQ 1-4)

Week 3: Sep. 10, 12  Republic 2: 360e-362c (SQ 5)  Sep. 12  Writing Assign One
                          Sep. 13  Journal post, Glaucon

Week 4: Sep. 17, 19  Enquiry, Sec. 1, Sec. 5, part 1 (SQ 1-4)

Week 5: Sep. 24, 26  Enquiry, Sec. 5, part 1-2 (SQ 5-7)

Week 6: Oct 1, 3  Enquiry, Sec. 9, part 2 (SQ 8)  Oct. 3  Writing Assign Two
                          Oct. 4  Journal post, Hume

Week 7: Oct. 8  FALL BREAK, NO CLASS
                       Oct. 10  Genealogy, Preface (SQ 1-4)

Week 8: Oct. 15, 17  Genealogy, First Treat., sec. 1-8 (SQ 5-7)

                                Oct. 25  Journal post, Nietzsche

Week 10: Oct. 29, 31  Republic 2: 368c-372b; 3: 414b-417b (SQ 1-4)

Week 11: Nov. 5, 7  Republic 4: 432b-434c; 439a-441c (SQ 5-7)

Week 12: Nov. 12, 14  Republic 4: 439a-445b (SQ 8-11)

Week 13: Nov. 19, 21  Republic 4: 441d-445b (SQ 10-11)  Nov. 21  Writing Assign Four
                                Nov. 22  Journal post, Socrates

Week 14: Nov. 26  Republic 5: 474c-480a (SQ 1)
                       Nov. 28  THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS

Week 15: Dec. 3, 5  Republic 7: 514a-518d (SQ 2-4)  Dec. 6  Term Paper Due

Week 16: Dec. 10, 12  Republic 10: 614b-621d (SQ 5-7)

FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, Dec. 17, 10:30am-12:20 pm

NOTE: This schedule is subject to change. Any changes to the weekly readings, including specific pages for you to focus on in the reading, will be posted on Canvas, in the assignment for that week’s journal entry. You should always check Canvas to be sure you are doing the correct assignment.
PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT GRADING STANDARDS

According to the Xavier University 2000-02 Catalog, the undergraduate grades of A, B, C, D, F signify the following:

A = Exceptional
B = Good
C = Satisfactory
D = Minimum Passing
F = Failure

On exams or work in which numerical grading is used the Philosophy Department agrees that these grades are equivalent to the following:

A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = 59 and below

The Philosophy Department further agrees that these letter grades signify the following level of accomplishment by students when given for discursive, written work:

A = work that not merely fully and accurately reproduces class discussion, the main thread in an argument or the main philosophical significance of a text under discussion, but which, having considered arguments and counter-arguments, goes beyond these and indicates a contribution of the student herself or himself, giving evidence of an individual and hence deeper understanding of the material in question.
B = work that shows a more or less complete and exact understanding of the issues, texts, and/or arguments as explained in class, clearly and logically formulated without going beyond such explanations.
C = work that shows basic understanding of the material but with errors, omissions and confusions of either a formal or material nature.
D = work that shows a minimal acquaintance with the material or serious logical and conceptual flaws in formulating responses to the question raised, the argument at issue, or to the philosophical text under discussion.
F = work that shows inadequate acquaintance with texts, issues, or ideas with little or no valid logical argumentation; or, the work is a plagiarism. Cases of plagiarism, which involve the use of published or others’ written work without giving credit, must be given F.

The department does not mandate grade distributions or curves. The final goal of all of our grading must be fairness to all students and the encouragement of the highest level of achievement possible in each student.

Approved by Philosophy Department
April 15, 2002
Revised, January 12, 2005