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100-BL1 Ethics as an Introduction to Philosophy

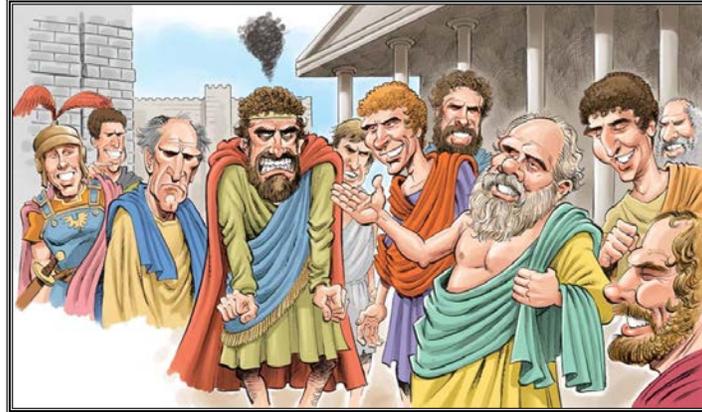
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Phil 100.BL / HIST 133.BL
ETHICS AS INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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This course is an introduction to philosophy through the special problems of ethics. This course is part of a blocked experience. Since philosophical movements and ideas do not arise in a vacuum, but rather are deeply embedded in cultural and historical contexts, we shall develop this material in conjunction with the themes raised in European History I. Just as it is impossible to cover all the events in Western history in fifteen weeks, this is equally the case with its ethical philosophy. Thus, the material that we will discuss together will be, by necessity, selective. We shall concentrate our attention then upon several of the great philosophical minds that were instrumental in shaping Western intellectual culture, especially in the area of ethics and value, from the time of the Greeks to the emergence of the Renaissance.

What is more, in studying these philosophers in connection with the historical environment in which they lived and worked, we hope to underscore the specific role of philosophical ideas in culture and history. Some of the themes we shall address include the relationship between poetry and philosophy, the nature of justice, the definition of the highest good, the freedom of the will, the relationship between philosophy and theology, specifically in the areas of religion and ethics, politics and ethics, and the changing conceptions of human nature which lie at the heart of these philosophical points of view. All of this will be done by means of our entering into conversation with such towering intellects as Plato, Peter Abelard, and Niccolo Machiavelli. We too shall be partners in that conversation, not only with these thinkers who have helped make our world, but with each other as well. This course is meant to be a beginning in philosophy, and it is designed to arrange some of the materials relevant to the Ethics, Religion & Society Focus in Xavier's core.

For students in the *Philosophy, Politics & the Public* honors program, this course provides essential background to the concerns of that program. The public sphere is a modern phenomenon, to be sure, but there are foreshadowings in the classical world. As we shall see, the division between the public and the private spheres of human experience were drawn in remarkably different ways from what we may be used to in our own lives. We shall endeavor to give expression to the precise nature of this division as it develops historically, as well as how it is explored in the philosophical ideas generated by the age. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of class on a daily basis, some of the subjects that

we wish to cover in the syllabus may not occur exactly on schedule and we may find ourselves doing things somewhat differently than the syllabus predicts. This is part of what makes this course so exciting and stimulating. Moreover, we believe that we are going to learn more and in a very different manner than ever before.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: By the conclusion of this course, students will have developed their skills in identifying the fundamental principles employed in important philosophical texts, their skills at defending philosophical positions in comparison with their alternatives, and express these ideas effectively both orally and in writing. In addition, we shall develop an awareness of the manner in which philosophical ideas and historical events and trends are interrelated.

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE:

Active participation in our daily discussions is an integral requirement of this course. This is true of our class discussions as well as our electronic discussion forum work. Participation means that you are prepared to discuss the material assigned for that day and that you are an active contributor to class discussion. While it is possible to pass this course without ever opening your mouth in class, it will be impossible for you to earn the highest grade for the semester unless you are a regular and active participant in class discussions. My policy on attendance is simple, you cannot participate if you are not here. Similarly, you cannot contribute to class discussion if you are routinely under-prepared. This class thrives on conversation rather than lecture, and it is difficult to contribute to, let alone benefit from, such discussion unless you are equipped to do so. I do not regularly take attendance, yet I too expect you to be in class unless you are ill or have some other valid reason for missing. ***While I do not take formal attendance, I am very much aware of students who miss an excessive number of classes and reserve the right to lower your final grade for excessive non-attendance and /or excessive lateness to class.***

BOOKS:

The following are required for the course and are listed in the order in which we shall read them:

Plato	<i>The Republic</i>
Boethius	<i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i>
Abelard	<i>Ethical Writings</i>
Aquinas	<i>Writings on Politics & Ethics</i>
Machiavelli	<i>The Prince</i> and handout materials*

REQUIREMENTS:

The requirements for the course are (1) active participation in the classroom conversation, whether this is to express your critical evaluation of the arguments made in the texts, or your own insights about the problems being discussed, or even your own frustration and confusion about what is being said. Honors Block succeeds when there is a multiplicity of voices. Be sure to add yours! (2) Active

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- Machiavelli's *Prince* was ordered through Dr. Korros' history class and is also available electronically on the Blackboard website for this course.

participation in class, (3) satisfactory work on your Tutorial assignments (described below), and (4) the final examination in December. ***Please consult the final page of this syllabus for the Grading Policy of the Philosophy Department.***

As the work that you are doing for the History part of Block aims to develop your skills at clear and effective writing across various formats, the Philosophy part of Block will concentrate on developing another skill set that you will need as you progress in your studies. To that end, we will focus upon the development of competency in the critical analysis of philosophical arguments, effective oral presentation of philosophical ideas, and the ability to think and speak “on one’s feet” to philosophical problems. Please note that while there is no way to avoid the evaluative nature of the following assignments (you are earning a grade in the course after all), they are meant to occur in a casual and relaxed atmosphere in which we exchange and evaluate ideas.

1. **THE WEEKLY SUMMARY ESSAY** - Each Friday designated on the calendar for the course, you will hand in a one page summary essay that focuses on a theme from that week’s reading and discussion. You only have one page, so you need to concentrate your attention on a single point, or a specific argument that you found interesting or problematic. In your essay, do not repeat the argument! Rather, identify briefly what the philosopher is asserting and then concentrate on any or several of the following:
 - a. What the thinker is presupposing and why it is justifiable or illegitimate to make that presupposition.
 - b. What the thinker concludes on a specific issue and why it is justifiable or illegitimate to draw that conclusion.
 - c. How the argument or position under consideration is related to the particular historical circumstances of the age in which the thinker lived.

2. **THE FRIDAY TUTORIAL** -- At Oxford these classes are called “tutorials”, at Cambridge, they are referred to as “supervisions”. The Tutorial has been a standard feature of British university education for many years. First of all, the name “tutorial” does not signify anything remedial or corrective of academic deficiency as it does in the United States. Far from it! In the UK system, it designates an intensively collaborative educational framework characterized by low student-to-teacher ratios (usually ranging from 1:1 to 4:1). The specific structure of the tutorial may vary widely. The standard model involved weekly or biweekly meetings between the faculty member and the students. Students are typically required to prepare a short essay on a specific theme that is either chosen or assigned. Students generally read aloud or summarize their work, after which the tutor and/or fellow students offer comment and critique. The Oxford tutorial is a highly respected educational model that has been praised for the degree of student initiative involved. Skills at critical analysis, oral presentation and creative thinking are fostered in situations where professors and students work in close collaboration. A video sample of an Oxford tutorial session in philosophy appears on Blackboard under COURSE CONTENT.

We will modify this basic model for our course this fall. Our Tutorials will occur during our class meeting on Friday of each week. In groups of three, you will prepare a one page essay that addresses a specific topic generated from that week’s reading and class discussion. Your Tutorial will take the following format:

1. It will last from 20-30 minutes, during which time your group will sit at the front of the class with me. The remainder of the class will take notes on what is said, and after the 20-30 period will be required to enter the conversation.

2. You will read your essay aloud to the group, after which there will be a discussion initiated by the professor, or by you.
3. The preparation of a summary essay based upon the tutorial discussion in class. List part is an individual rather than group assignment; each member of the tutorial group prepares their own paper. The paper should be no more than 5 pages in length and is due to me on the Friday FOLLOWING your in-class tutorial.

1. Short Friday Essays

These papers are meant to be no more than **one page** (double spaced) in length and should aim at a summary of the arguments advanced in the texts that we have discussed in class. The aim here is to help you to develop the ability to reconstruct a philosophical argument. At this point, the only thing you need to say by way of critical evaluation of the argument should be very preliminary. I am not looking for you to construct detailed counter-arguments to those that you summarize. These are due each Friday.

2. Summary Essays

The papers are meant to be no more than **five pages** (double spaced) in length and should aim at a critical discussion of the material covered in your Friday Tutorial. I have included the following guidelines for preparing these papers. Please read through them so as to avoid some of the most common pitfalls that occur in writing. Due dates are as follows (open to change):

WHAT TO AVOID IN YOUR WRITING:

1. **Be succinct and to the point. There should be no unnecessary material here, don't say that "Socrates, who was a great Greek philosopher ..." as I already know that. Stay within the one page limit while at the same time attending to the core ideas that you need to address.**
2. **Do not just summarize what was said in the books!!!! This is the most important thing for you to avoid. Do not tell me what Socrates said in response to Polemarchus' claim that justice is benefiting friends and harming enemies. You can assume that I know what is going on in the dialogue.**
3. **Do not weaken your claims by using phrases like "It may be my opinion, but I think ...", or "I am not sure but...". Be assertive!**
4. **Avoid using weak verbs such as "Socrates feels that justice is the most important thing in human experience". FEELS is about as weak as it gets in terms of intellectual convictions. Remember that Socrates was executed for his beliefs. People are not willing to die because they "feel" that something is the truth. Good strong verb alternatives to use are: Socrates asserts, or maintains, or argues, or believes. NEVER USE THE VERB "FEELS" TO DESCRIBE WHAT SOCRATES OR ANY OTHER PHILOSOPHICAL WRITER BELIEVES!!!!**
5. **Avoid using slang or conversational language. Do not abbreviate words in a colloquial manner (such as using "math" when you mean "mathematics"). This is formal writing, it is not supposed to sound like a casual conversation between people.**
6. **See #4!!!**

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR WRITING:

Build an argument. Take a critical position on the issue. This means you should agree or disagree with what Socrates (or any other speaker) is saying and you need to give your reasons for why you agree or disagree. Giving the reasons is the most important part.

Have a strong opening that will state a thesis, it will introduce the reader of your essay to what you are going to do. Such as:

In the *Republic*, Socrates argues with several others concerning the nature of justice. In Socrates' mind, all of their definitions are too weak or too narrow to be adequate as definitions. He proposes a more complex definition, stating that justice has to do with a harmony in the soul. In this essay, we shall explore Socrates' definition of justice as harmony in the soul, and we shall offer the reasons why his view is far superior to any other given in Books I and II. We shall show that Socrates' arguments are well constructed and that his definition of justice offers much more clarity concerning the nature of the moral life.

Have a strong concluding paragraph as a close to the essay. Summarize the problem you discussed and the manner in which you discussed it. Re-emphasize your conclusion.

Book titles, such as the *Republic*, must be either underlined or in italic type. All foreign language words must be in italic type.

All references to Plato can be placed in parentheses after the quoted passage using the Stephanus numbers and letters found in the margins of your text as in (325e).

7. Final Exam

There will be an oral final examination using the group format. More information will be made available around Thanksgiving. The dates and times for the final exam are as follows: Monday, December 16 and Wednesday December 18, 10:00 – 11:50 both days.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:

The Xavier University policy on academic honesty as it appears on Xavier's website is in effect for this course:

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation. All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student's own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another's efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one's own. Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an "F" in the course, and expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents, though the teacher has full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course. If disputes of interpretation arise, the student, faculty member, and chair should attempt to resolve the difficulty. If this is

unsatisfactory, the dean will rule in the matter. As a final appeal, the academic vice president will call a committee of tenured faculty for the purpose of making a final determination.

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OFFICE HOURS:

My office hours are listed below. I am in the office more than this, but these are the times I have set aside for meeting students. Office hours mean that I am in my office waiting to see students for reasons that pertain to our class. Department or committee meetings may conflict with these posted times. I will indicate when that is the case on my bulletin board. If you cannot get there during posted office hours, you can always make an appointment for a time that is mutually convenient. You also have my phone numbers and my email address. Please use them!

**Office Hours -- Hinkle Hall 210 TR 12:30 - 3:00
And by appointment**

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

PLEASE NOTE ~ *The following schedule is tentative only. The content and rhythm of class discussion may require that we make adjustments as the semester moves along. Such adjustments will be announced in class.*

Week 1: August 26

This week will involve an introduction to the course through a consideration of the historical progression from archaic to classical Greece. The historical material will take up all of the class meeting time for the week and will prepare the way for the start of the philosophical material in Week 2. Please devote special attention to the material from Homer's Iliad, as Plato will make considerable use of epic poetry as he designs the ideal city in *The Republic*.

Week 2: September 2, 4, 6 (September 2 – Labor Day Holiday – No Class)

This week will transition into the study of philosophy proper with the study of Plato and the role of philosophical speculation in the articulation of ethical values. We shall constantly refer to the connection between Plato's philosophy in the *Republic* and the social and cultural crisis at Athens resulting from the defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Topics include the various voices at Athens concerning the ethical and human ideal; and we shall make an initial attempt at defining the features of a *philosophical* treatment of justice.

Readings: *Republic*, Book I

Week 3: September 9, 11, 13

The problem of the "public" will be addressed this week, with special attention paid to the popular attitudes towards ethical standards and behavior. We shall also see the transition to politics and explore the connection between ethics and politics.

Readings: *Republic*, Book II

Week 4: September 16, 18, 20

Plato also provides a detailed account of the ideal city in general and the role of the producing and military classes within it in particular. Of vital importance is the myth that is told at 414b – 415d, where what will come to be known as “civil religion” is given an early formulation.

Readings: *Republic*, Book III

Week 5: September 23, 25, 27

Plato’s psychology is offered here in which he articulates the parts of the soul place of the virtues in it. The metaphysics of the *Republic* is also introduced towards the end of Book V. This represents the very heart of Platonism as a philosophy and it will be absolutely indispensable to the emergence of Christianity later on. Plato provides the celebrated doctrine of the Forms with special attention paid to the Form of the Good.

Readings: *Republic*, Book IV and V

Week 6: September 30, October 2, 4

We shall continue to examine the metaphysical views which lie at the heart of Platonism, as well as consider some of his most famous allegorical passages with particular emphasis on the Allegory of the Cave.

Readings: *Republic*, Book VI and VII (514 – 517d only)

Week 7: October 7, 9, 11 (October 7 – Fall Holiday – No Class)

The Hellenistic world through the several schools that arose to develop a new “philosophy of life”. Most importantly, we shall discuss the metaphysics of Neoplatonism that will serve as the framework for Medieval philosophy – Christian, Jewish and Islamic – for the next 1000 years. Christian philosophy in the late period of Rome is presented in the work of Boethius. Boethius’ *Consolation* was a work of profound importance throughout the Christian Middle Ages. Even at the dawn of modernity, it continued to exert great cultural influence and Queen Elizabeth I of England was one of Boethius’ many translators. Boethius engages many core philosophical problems that confounded Medieval Christian culture, including the reconciliation of human freedom with divine foreknowledge.

Readings: Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* Book I

Week 8: October 14, 16, 18

Christian philosophy in the late period of Rome continues.

Readings: Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* Book II and III

Week 9: October 21, 23, 25

Christian philosophy continues.

Readings: Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* Book III and IV

Week 10: October 28, 30, November 1

We shall finish Boethius and then transition to the dialectical tradition in medieval philosophy. Peter Abelard was the foremost logician of his age. He applied the dialectical tools of logic to the problems of philosophy as well as to theological issues such as the Trinity. His innovative approach made him an object of suspicion among more conservative theologians and philosophers. His ethical writings contain a brilliant psychological analysis of sin and redemption in the moral life of human beings. We shall also address certain issues in medieval ethics.

Readings: Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* Book V
Abelard, *Ethical Writings*

Week 11: November 4, 6, 8

Peter Abelard and medieval ethical problems continues.

Readings: Abelard, *Ethical Writings*

Week 12: November 11, 13, 15

Thirteenth century scholastic philosophy represents the most sophisticated synthesis of Christian belief, Greek philosophical ideas, and contributions made from the Arab and Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages. With the rediscovery of Aristotle's works around 1200CE and their integration into the Christian intellectual world-view, medieval European philosophical culture underwent a dramatic and difficult transformation. We shall explore some of these influences, especially the rediscovery of Aristotle in the Latin West, together with their impact upon European intellectual culture. In Aquinas, we shall see the Christian expression of Natural Law theory together with its application to such moral problems as usury, heresy, sexual ethics, and suicide.

Readings: Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Ethics & Politics*
Selected passages to be announced in class

Week 13: November 18, 20, 22

Aquinas and the Christian expression of Natural Law theory together with its application to such moral problems as usury, heresy, sexual ethics, and suicide continued.

Readings: Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Ethics & Politics*
Selected passages to be announced in class

Week 14: November 25 (Thanksgiving Holiday ... November 27-December 1 ... NO CLASSES)

The Renaissance begins with the rediscovery of classical texts, most importantly, the recovery and translation of the works of Plato by Marsilio Ficino. The major emphases of the philosophical achievement of the Renaissance will be discussed, together with a discussion of Machiavelli's *Prince*.

Readings: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (from Dr. Korros' booklist)

Week 15: December 2, 4, 6

Further discussion of Machiavelli's *Prince*.

Readings: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (from Dr. Korros' booklist)

Week 16: December 9, 11

Continuation of Machiavelli and conclusion to the course.

EXAM Week 17: Monday, December 16 and Wednesday December 18, 10:00 – 11:50 both days