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100-BL Ethics as an 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 the European History component of block. 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 nineteenth century.

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 will 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, Niccolo Machiavelli, John Stuart Mill and Sigmund Freud. 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 that 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. Consistent with the mission of Xavier University as a Jesuit, Catholic university rooted in the liberal arts tradition, the Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS) sequence of courses provides a basis for you to become intellectually, morally and spiritually educated individuals capable of critical reflection on ethical and religious questions of social significance from the perspective of multiple disciplines with unique methods. In this course, that method is philosophical.

**Purpose of Philosophy 100:** As long as there have been human beings, justice has been a question—its nature, its forms, and its very possibility. By studying classic works of philosophy, especially Plato’s *Republic,* you will examine different views on justice and human goodness, tracing them back to the principles on which they depend, and reflect critically on these principles. You will also develop your ability to identify, understand and critique a variety of ethical issues. Finally, you will be introduced to other basic human questions and philosophical ways of thinking about them.

This course is part of the Xavier Core Curriculum, which aims to develop people of learning and reflection, integrity and achievement, in solidarity for and with others. It addresses the following core learning objectives at the introductory level:

1a: Students recognize and cogently discuss significant questions in the humanities, arts, and the natural and social sciences.

3a: Students will identify and critically assess multiple dimensions of an ethical issue in an attempt to reach a conclusion.

**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. Similarly, internet surfing, text messaging or other activity on an electronic device that is not relevant to class work will not be tolerated.*

**BOOKS:** The following are required for the course and are listed in the order in which we shall read them. Other materials will be available on CANVAS under "Files".
Plato, *The Republic* (Hackett)
Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Penguin)
Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Hackett)

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) satisfactory work on your Tutorial discussion and paper assignments (described below), and (3) the final group oral examination in December.

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 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 CANVAS under FILES.

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. PLEASE MAKE ENOUGH COPIES TO DISTRIBUTE TO THE CLASS SO THAT EVERYBODY HAS ONE. Your group can choose any topic from the week's discussion that you wish. Your single page should provide a brief summary of the topic as well as your critical evaluation of its conclusions. Do you agree or disagree with the thinker’s position on your topic? Give reasons why you evaluate it as you do. Your Tutorial session with me 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 Dr. Korros and myself. The rest of the students will take notes on what is said, and after the 20-30 minute 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 professors, or by you. This discussion will aim at a deeper examination of the topics you addressed in your one page summary.

3. Each group will have two tutorial dates. The groups for the Friday Tutorial Discussions are as follows:

   Sept. 9  Bond, Burns, Childress
   Sept. 16 Denny, Edwards, Fischer
   Sept. 23 Godwin, Hayes, Hesse
   Sept. 30 Jerabek, Lawson, Lewis
   Oct. 14 Marsh, Massa, Moore
   Oct. 21 Schatz, Steele, Wangelin
   Oct. 28 Bond, Burns, Childress
   Oct. 30 Denny, Edwards, Fischer
   Nov. 4  Godwin, Hayes, Hesse
   Nov. 11 Jerabek, Lawson, Lewis
   Nov. 18 Marsh, Massa, Moore
   Dec. 2  Schatz, Steele, Wangelin

2. THE SHORT PAPERS – At the conclusion of our discussion of each thinker, you will submit a short paper of 3 to 5 pages that offers your evaluation of the author we have studied.

PLATO PAPER – DUE OCTOBER 14
The passage below is taken from Plato’s dialogue The Gorgias in which Socrates enters into conversation with Gorgias, one of the greatest sophists of the time. Gorgias is speaking in this passage, praising the power of rhetorical speech. There are several things that he says with which Socrates would disagree. Using our discussions of The Republic, identify two of these points of disagreement and explain why Socrates would criticize them. State why or why you do not agree with Socrates’ position.

Gorgias: You might well be amazed, Socrates, if you only knew how rhetoric comprehends and holds under her sway all the inferior arts. Let me offer you a striking example of this. On several occasions I have been with my brother Herodícus or some other physician to see one of his patients, who would not allow the physician to give him medicine, or apply a knife or hot iron to him; and I have persuaded him to do for me what he would not do for the physician just by the use of rhetoric. And I say that if a rhetorician and a physician were to go to any city, and had there to argue in the Ecclesia or any other assembly as to which of them should be elected state-physician, the physician would have no chance; but he who could speak would be chosen if he wished; and in a contest with a man of any other profession the rhetorician more than any one would have the power of getting himself chosen, for he can speak more persuasively to the multitude than any of them, and on any subject. Such is the nature and power of the art of rhetoric ... for the rhetorician can speak against all men and upon any subject, he can persuade the multitude better than any other man of anything which he pleases, but he should not therefore seek to defraud the physician or any other artist of his reputation merely because he has the power; he ought to use rhetoric fairly, as he would also use his athletic powers. And if after having become a rhetorician he makes a bad use of his strength and skill, his instructor surely ought not on that account to be held in disrepute or banished. For he was
intended by his teacher to make a good use of his instructions, but he abuses them. And therefore he is the person who ought to be held in disrepute, banished, and put to death, and not his instructor.

MACHIAVELLI PAPER – DUE OCTOBER 31
In his multi-volume history of philosophy, Frederick Copleston makes the following assertion about Machiavelli: "It has been said that in The Prince, Machiavelli was concerned simply to give the mechanics of government, that he prescinded from moral questions and wished simply to state the means by which political power may be established and maintained. No doubt this is true ...". Using our discussions about Machiavelli, write a short essay that challenges Copleston's claim that The Prince makes no attempt to engage moral questions such as the good, what is right, etc.

MILL PAPER – DUE NOVEMBER 21
Mill's version of utilitarianism has continued to exercise a profound influence on the moral and political thinking of the English-speaking world. It is still influential today in our attempt to organize our thinking about specific moral problems raised by business practice, medical technology and in decision-making in general. How do you evaluate Mill’s utilitarianism? Are there weaknesses that you can identify, and if so, what are they and why are they weaknesses? Is there an overall strength about his philosophy that is sufficient to outweigh these weaknesses?

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).

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT GRADING STANDARDS:

The standards for grading in the Department of Philosophy are articulated below. You would do well to consult them prior to writing your papers.

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

“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.

Using a paper that is substantially identical to one used by the student in another class is considered academic dishonesty and penalties for submitting such a paper will be the same as those for plagiarism. 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: April 15, 2002; Revised: March 20, 2006

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: Wednesday, December 16 and Friday 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.


TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM:

More and more, students rely on laptops, tablets and smart phones in order to access materials for classroom use. At the same time, my experience has shown that these devices make it easy for students to become distracted from class work.
OFFICE HOURS:

My office is located in Hinkle Hall #210 and my 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!

Official office hours are:

Monday, Wednesday & Friday, 2:00-3:00
Tuesday & Thursday, 9:00 – 12:00
And by appointment
colella@xavier.edu

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 22, 24, 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*.

Readings: Brumbaugh, “The Sophists: How to Succeed in Athens”, “Socrates: The Search for the Self” and “Athens: The School of Greece” all in one document on Canvas under “Files”

Week 2: August 29, 31, September 2 - This week will transition into the study of philosophy proper with the study of Plato (427-347 BCE) 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 5 – Labor Day Holiday – No Class), September 7, 9 - 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 12, 14, 16 - 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 19, 21, 23** - 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 26, 28, 30** - 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 3, 5 (October 7 - 8 Fall Holiday – No Class)** - The Renaissance begins with the rediscovery of classical texts, most importantly, the recovery and translation of the works of Plato by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). The major emphases of the philosophical achievement of the Renaissance will be discussed, leading to a close study of the works of Machiavelli (1469-1527), focusing on The Prince. Machiavelli is rightly identified as the originator of Modern Philosophy, and we will investigate what this might mean given the general thrust of his writing.

Readings: Machiavelli, The Prince and Discourses (excerpts on Canvas)

**Week 8: October 10, 12, 14** – Machiavelli continued.

Readings: Machiavelli, The Prince

**Week 9: October 17, 19, 21** – By far, Utilitarianism is one of the most influential traditions in modern ethical philosophy. It emerges during the late 18th and 19th centuries in Britain as a response to both the French Revolution and profound changes in society that result from a robust and expanding industrialism. Its chief proponents were Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). We will investigate the manner in which Mill tries to fashion a conception of justice that is compatible with the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

Readings: Mill, Utilitarianism

**Week 10: October 24, 26, 28** – Utilitarianism continued.

Readings: Mill, Utilitarianism

**Week 11: October 31, November 2, 4** – Utilitarianism continued.

Readings: Mill, Utilitarianism

**Week 12: November 7, 9, 11**

We finish the course with the provocative work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In 1909 Freud made his only trip to the United States where he delivered a series of lectures Clark University in Massachusetts. These lectures, subsequently published as Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis provide a
brief but detailed overview of the core doctrines of psychoanalysis as they existed in 1909. We shall use this text as an introduction to the course, just as Freud had intended these lectures as introductory when he spoke at Clark. We will examine Freud’s account of the original case dating from the early 1880’s from which psychoanalysis developed, the Case of “Anna O”.

Readings: Freud, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, First Lecture

**Week 13: November 14, 16, 18**

Readings: Freud, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Second and Third Lectures

**Week 14: November 21 (Thanksgiving Holiday ... November 23-27 ... NO CLASSES)**

Readings: Freud, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Fourth and Fifth Lectures

**Week 15: November 28, 30, December 2**

In *Civilization & Its Discontents* (1929-30) Freud argues the case for his cultural and historical pessimism in what is perhaps his most disturbing book. Written as the Western nations were about to plunge into the economic ruin of the Great Depression, and with Hitler on the not too distant horizon in European politics, this book is remarkable for its unvarnished consideration of humankind’s bleak prospects. Quite simply, the erotic instinct may no longer be able to restrain the instinct for aggression and destruction. World War I had already demonstrated that weapons technology could possibly eliminate humanity from the globe once and for all. This technology, combined with the uncontrollable death instinct, has placed the very future of humankind in jeopardy. All this some fifteen years before Hiroshima and Auschwitz! The final sentence added in the second edition gives voice to Freud’s pessimistic appraisal of what the 1930’s may possibly hold in store.

Readings: Freud, *Civilization & Its Discontents*

**Week 16: December 5, 7, 9** – The later chapters engage the basic impulse to establish ethical norms to govern human choice and action in civilization. Freud uses his discoveries to critique this effort, especially in regard to Christian ethics which he takes to be its most extreme form of this project. Astonishingly, he argues that the instinct for aggression reveals itself as the source of moral conscience.

Readings: Freud, *Civilization & Its Discontents*

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