PHIL 100-01-05-07 Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy

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Course Description

*Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy* is an introduction to philosophical thought by way of Plato’s *Republic* and other readings in moral philosophy with a special emphasis on justice. We will engage in a critical examination of right and wrong pertaining to human motives, actions, and character disposition. The course investigates primary texts representative of the three most prominent ethical positions: *eudaemonism*, *deontology*, and *utilitarianism*. We begin the course with a consideration of moral relativism, the position that there are no universally applicable principles of right and wrong. Is ethics subjective if there are competing, equally compelling sources of moral obligation and goodness? Then we dive into Plato’s *Republic*, the central question of which is the nature of justice and whether cultivating a just character and the best human life are co-implicatory. Plato will be the class spokesperson for *eudaemonism*. We’ll spend much time thinking about character virtue. We then shift attention to Kant’s *Grounding*, the standard-bearer for *deontology*. Are there objective principles of moral obligation that have nothing to do with the outcome of actions? What determines whether an action is good or not? What grants an action moral worth? Last, we will read selections from Mill’s *Utilitarianism*. Is the standard of right and wrong a certain sort of consequence and result?

Course Aims

1. Students will become conversant with basic themes, concepts, questions, problems, and methods that belong to the treatment of ethics within the philosophical tradition.
2. Students will attain a basic understanding of what characterizes the discipline and importance of philosophy.
3. Students will engage in critical reflection upon the roles that character and reason play in the human condition generally and in their own lives particularly.
4. Students will explore and inhabit competing, compelling positions within the philosophical tradition; students will foster their own understanding based on reflection of the various positions.
5. Students will practice and improve facility with reasoning, critiquing, and formulating reasoned accounts in writing and in speech.
6. Students will practice and improve facility with understanding and interpreting argumentative texts.

Required Text


The edition listed above is required. No alternate translation or edition is acceptable. Please acquire the exact edition listed. NO ELECTRONIC TEXTS ARE ALLOWED unless medically necessary. Otherwise, the physical books are required. (See course policy 3, below.) Kant, Mill, and any supplementary readings will be distributed as free PDFs.
Graded Assignments

The assignment percentage of the final grade is provided. Requests for grade calculations will not be accepted.

1. Two Essays 40% (or 55%) (see Course Policy 1, below)
   A. Plato 20% (or 25%)
   B. Kant 20% (or 30%)

Students are required to write two papers, 105 to 138 lines each (4 ½ to 6 pages, double spaced). Students have the option to co-author papers with anyone in the class or another of my ethics sections this semester. Co-authored papers must be a minimum of 127 lines. The instructor reserves the right to interview both authors to verify collaboration.

I do not “pre-grade” essays. That is, I do not accept requests to read entire drafts or multiple paragraphs merely to check whether they are ok. Request for help must be accompanied by articulate, specific points of concern. If you have specific questions or concerns about specific points or interpretations of text that you are claiming, then we may meet to discuss your thinking. If only a quick point of clarification is desired on something specific, asking by email is fine, too.

Students must submit papers to TURNITIN on the course Canvas site before also handing in a hard copy on the due date. Writing guidelines, expectations, and rubric are provided on Canvas and will be discussed well in advance of the due date for the first paper.

2. Quizzes (scheduled & pop) 20%
   I do not know how many pop quizzes will be given or exactly how many scheduled quizzes there will be, so each quiz will receive a number grade out of 100 points corresponding to the traditional A-F grading scale. The average of the total quiz scores will count toward 20% of the final grade.

3. Debates 15% (Time permitting; see Course Policy 1, below.)
   Students will be assigned to groups that represent the point of view of Plato, Descartes, or Hume. Groups will debate each other concerning assigned questions using the point of view of their respective philosophers.

4. Final Exam 15%
   Cumulative. Format TBA.

5. Participation 10%
   Classroom participation and is not a freebie. Participation means:
   (a) Thoroughly reading and reflecting on the assigned text prior to class.
      Assigned readings should take about an hour to get through. Read through once rapidly and a second time slowly and carefully. Outline the arguments and write down any questions or comments you wish to bring up in class.
   (b) Demonstration of (a) through answering questions voluntarily and when called upon.
(c) Voluntarily supporting and critiquing accounts offered by me and fellow students in a constructive way that enhances class discussion of the assigned reading.

Nodding off, staring out the window (real or imagined), working on assignments from other classes, use of phone or computer, discussing something irrelevant to class with one’s neighbor, and generally being disengaged, inattentive, or distracting to others will reduce participation credit and may result in being marked absent according to the instructor’s prerogative.

**Course Policies**

1. The syllabus may be altered in accordance with class needs. Debates depend on the amount of time left at the end of the semester upon finishing the course readings. If not enough time remains, then the Plato essay will count for 25% of the final grade and the Kant essay 30%.

2. Attendance
   Students must attend class regularly and arrive on time with the assigned reading. *Students who do not have a physical copy of the assigned reading will be marked absent.* A sign-in sheet will be provided at the start of each class, which will be collected once class begins and not be available after. Please sign in as soon as you enter class. A student caught signing in for others will lose all participation credit for both themselves and those for whom they signed-in.

Subtracting the first (course intro) and last days (optional final review), there are 40 class meetings. 8 absences (⅕ of class meetings), *no matter what the reason*, will result in automatic failure for the course. If official university responsibilities, e.g., athletics, have you missing more than 7 classes, then you must withdraw from the course immediately. *Students are responsible for keeping track of how many classes are missed.* Requests for absence tallies will not be accepted.

In-class assignments may be made up only when missed due to a documented medical illness, a university sanctioned responsibility (e.g., athletics), or a bona fide family emergency.

3. Computers, smart phones, etc.
   No electronic device may be used in class unless there is a documented, medical need. When class begins, all electronic devices must be closed, turned off, and put away.

4. Email
   In the subject line, include your last name, course and section number. Any email that does not include this information in the subject line may not be noticed or deleted.

5. Office hours:

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<th>Monday, Wednesday</th>
<th>Tuesday, Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:20 - 10:50 am (open)</td>
<td>9:30 to 2:45 pm (by appointment)</td>
<td>10:20 - 10:50 am (open)</td>
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<td>2:00 - 2:45 pm (open)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:30 – 7:00 pm (by appointment)</td>
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I wish for every student to enjoy and get as much out of class as possible. Never hesitate to stop by my office for extra help or further discussion. However, office hours are not an alternative class time for those who miss class without just cause to find out what happened in class.

6. Academic Honesty

Xavier’s policy on academic honesty states (http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/Xaviers-Policy-on-Academic-Honesty.cfm):

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.

It is the student’s responsibility to understand what constitutes plagiarism. Ignorance does not exempt a student from the consequences of any violation of academic honesty. Any student who plagiarizes a paper will be given a zero for the assignment. Whether one line or half of the paper, the student will receive a zero, period. Any student caught cheating on a quiz will receive zero credit for the quiz, period.

All students must:
(1) Complete the plagiarism tutorial on the library’s web site (http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/Preventing-Plagiarism.cfm) and
(2) Attain a perfect score on the XU Tutor plagiarism quiz, also on the library’s website (http://libdev.xu.edu/quizzes/quiz0010/index0010.htm) before handing in their first assignment. If you have any uncertainty whether inclusion of an idea constitutes plagiarism, ask before you turn in an assignment. No leeway will be given. Cheating on a paper will result in loss of all credit for the paper, i.e., a zero will be recorded. Cheating on quizzes will result in loss of all quiz credit, i.e., a zero will be recorded for every quiz. Any two instances of cheating will result in failure for the course.

7. Students with special needs

Students with special needs should contact the Student Learning Center (513-745-3280 or http://www.xavier.edu/lac/student-disability-services.cfm). Please approach me by the end of the first full week with any needs. Any reasonable accommodation will be made.