100-21-24-26 ethics as an Introduction to Philosophy

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PHIL 100: Ethics as an Introduction to Philosophy, Fall 2013
Sections 24 / 26 / 21
T/TH 8:30-9:45 / 1:00-2:15 / 2:30-3:45
Classroom: CLC 320 (sect. 24) / Lindner 101 (sects. 26, 21)

Instructor: James L. Wood
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Phone: 745-4955
Office Hours: T/TH 10:00-12:00, W 1:30-3:30 and by appointment
Office: Hinkle 225

Course website: canvas.xavier.edu. Note: We will not use Blackboard, though some of your other courses might. We will use Canvas mainly to submit paper assignments, upload and download important course documents, record and receive grades, and maintain online journals (see below).

Overview:

In this course we will examine several different conceptions of justice, virtue, liberty, and politics with the central aim of becoming more thoughtful about what it means to live a good life both individually and collectively. To set the historical context for our philosophical investigations, we will begin with a brief consideration of some key sections of Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War before turning to the two greatest ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. We will examine the first part of Plato's investigation of justice and virtue in both individuals and political communities in the Republic and Aristotle's account of the link between virtue and happiness in the Nicomachean Ethics. Then we will take up a competing ethical theory, utilitarianism, in the writings of 19th Century British philosopher J.S. Mill. After this we will return to Plato and the later part of the Republic to consider Plato’s proposed philosopher-ruled city as well as his criticisms of democracy and other competing forms of government. By way of contrast we will conclude with selections from Mill’s On Liberty, one of the most eloquent and powerful modern defenses of liberty and individuality.

Reading:

Reading is the foundation of the course. Consequently, it is extremely important that you read carefully and consistently before every class. Page assignments are usually short, but the material is often dense and difficult, so I recommend devoting at least 2-3 hours to study (and take notes on) each day's assigned text. We will read the following philosophers and texts this semester. Please see the end of the syllabus for the reading schedule.

Note: I strongly recommend using the editions and (especially) translations that I have ordered. Otherwise you will have difficulty following the class discussions and writing papers.


Course Objectives:

By the conclusion of this course you should be able to:

1) Reflect thoughtfully on the questions, arguments, and theories concerning justice, virtue, liberty, and related issues that our readings put forward.
2) Articulate your considered thoughts on these questions, arguments, and theories clearly and precisely, both in the

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1 This course is part of Xavier’s Ethics, Religion, and Society program (E/RS), which is intended to promote reflection on questions of moral significance. For more information, please visit www.xavier.edu/ers. This course also is part of Xavier’s Core Curriculum program, which includes two additional philosophy courses: Theory of Knowledge and an elective. For more information, please visit www.xavier.edu/cas/core.cfm.
2 The following goals are specific to this course. The university is in the process of revising its official Core Curriculum goals and objectives.
writing assignments and in class discussion.
3) Compare the views of different writers with each other and with your own views.
4) Apply the ethical insights you have gained to your own life and to our own time and place.

Requirements:

1. Writing:

   Essays: You will write two formal essays (due dates on reading schedule). I'll give you topics and guidelines later. You must submit an electronic copy to Canvas. I will deduct a partial letter grade for each day that an essay is late (e.g. B- becomes C after two days). You may rewrite the first paper if you (1) take a copy of your paper to the Writing Center (see www.xavier.edu/writing_center) and (2) turn in both the revised version and the original no later than one week after receiving the graded original. The grade of the rewrite will replace the grade of the original. Each essay will be graded according to five criteria: organization, understanding of material, use of text, analysis and argumentation, and writing mechanics and style.

   Journals: Throughout the semester you will keep a journal on Canvas (I will explain how to do this elsewhere). Half of you will have entries due on Tuesdays, half of you on Thursdays (15 total). I’ll switch the days halfway through the semester to keep things fair. Entries must be submitted before class to avoid lateness penalties, but you may revise entries up to one week after class, and I will take your revisions into account in assessing your grade. Sometimes I will ask you to write on a specific issue or question; if not, you may write on anything you like from the assigned section. Some combination of summary, analysis, and commentary is appropriate. The length of each entry will vary, but a useful measure is one double-spaced typewritten page. You can offer comments on each other's journals, which I will factor into your class participation grade. Also, I will expect you to bring your journal reflections to bear on class discussion. Each entry will be graded according to three criteria: clarity, depth, and thoroughness.

2. Discussion:

   Philosophy depends on active participation in dialogue. Consequently, class participation makes up a significant percentage of your final grade. There will be three main types of participation:

   (1) General class discussion. This consists of asking and answering questions, making comments, and at the very least appearing interested and engaged in what is being said by others.

   (2) Small group discussion. I will assign one person to lead the small group discussion and another person to report the findings of the group to the class. Other members of the group, if any, will be responsible for participating actively in that group’s discussion.

   (3) Protocols. At least once during the semester I will ask each of you to be an official class note-taker, which will involve recording key points of that day’s lecture and discussion, posting them online, and then summarizing them at the beginning of the next class. The note-taker, and only the note-taker (see below), will be allowed to use a computer during class to take notes.

   Grading: On Canvas I will post up a document spelling out my standards for class participation and explaining the grading of the extra participation options mentioned below. I will assign a provisional discussion grade halfway through the semester based on three main criteria: quantity (how much and how often you are participating), quality (the insightfulness and helpfulness of your remarks), and engagement (your demonstration of attention, interest, and responsiveness to the material). For small group discussion, I will also take into account how well you facilitate discussion as a leader and how clearly and effectively you communicate its results to the class. Finally, protocols will be assessed based on their thoroughness, accuracy, and clarity. I will take improvement into account in determining your final grade.

   Extra participation credit: While your participation grade will be primarily determined by your contribution to class discussion in these three ways, you may also improve this grade through the following activities:

   1) Talk with me about the class material (that means the actual content of our reading and discussion, not particular assignments, your grade, or other matters) for at least 15 minutes in office hours.

   2) Attend any E/RS lecture or other pre-approved philosophy event and write a 1-2 page report summarizing and commenting on the event. You must turn this in by the following class. This credit may be used to reverse an absence if you are over the limit (see below); otherwise it will boost your class participation grade.

   3) Post questions or comments to the journal entries of your peers (see above).

   Attendance: Failure to attend class will result in penalties applied to the class participation portion of your final
grade (see below). If you miss more than 2 classes, I will begin deducting a partial letter grade for each additional absence from that portion of your grade. So if you miss 3 classes, a B will be reduced to a B-, at 4 it becomes a C+, and so on. Only documented medical and family emergencies count as excused absences unless you speak to me before your absence about a valid reason for needing to miss class (such as a university sponsored activity). However, any student who misses 8 or more classes (i.e., 4 weeks and more than ¼ of the total) for any reason will automatically fail the course (or be asked to withdraw). I reserve the right to start counting lateness to class as absence if it becomes chronic. If you arrive after I check attendance, it is your responsibility to make sure I don’t count you as absent.

3. **Quizzes:**

I will give periodic unannounced quizzes. The point is to ensure that you are doing the reading and reading carefully. Quizzes will be graded pass/fail.

4. **Exam:**

There will be a cumulative final exam on the assigned date for your section. I will give you more information in due course.

**Grading:**

- First Essay: 15%
- Second Essay: 20%
- Quizzes: 10%
- Journals: 20%
- Final Exam: 20%
- Participation: 15%

**Class Policies:**

1) Always have your text and a notebook with you. Coming to class without these materials is like showing up to play a baseball game without a bat and glove.

2) No computers or other electronics (unless you're a note-taker; see above). Keep notes the old-fashioned way, with pen and paper. Please remember to turn off your cell phones. And if I catch you using your phones in class (texting or whatever), I'll count you absent.

3) No food. Drinks are acceptable.

4) No irrelevant conversation. If your talking is not related to the class material (for example, some people are tempted just to chat in small group discussion), you'll be wasting your time and that of others, and we'll all get irritated at you.

**Academic Conduct:**

Academic dishonesty of any sort will not be tolerated. Most serious is plagiarism. If you turn in work that is not your own in any way—for example, copied in whole or part from another student, from secondary texts, from the Internet (this includes SparkNotes), etc.—it will receive no credit, and will be reported to the Dean’s Office. A second offense will result in expulsion from the course. Note that I will be checking papers for plagiarism. To make sure we're all on the same page about plagiarism, please complete the online library tutorial and quiz on the subject: (http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/index.cfm). If necessary, take the quiz several times until you have scored 100%. This will need to be completed before the first paper is due for you to receive credit on the paper. Plagiarism aside, in both your written work and class discussion, it is very important that you be honest: about what you don’t understand, about what you like or don’t like, about questions or problems you may have, and about your ideas and opinions.

**Reading Schedule:**

(8/29): Thucydides, Editor’s Introduction (ix-xix) and Ch. 2 (15-29)

3 Subject to change over the course of the semester.
Week 2 (9/3): Thucydides, Ch. 3 (pp. 39-58) and Ch. 5 (pp. 89-93)
         (9/5): Thucydides, Ch. 4 (66-75) and Ch. 6 (102-109)

Week 3 (9/10): Republic Book 1 (beginning to 336a)
         (9/12): Republic Book 1 (336b-344c)

Week 4 (9/17): Republic Book 1 (344d-end)
         (9/19): Republic Book 2 (beginning to 369b)

Week 5 (9/24): Republic Book 2 (369b-end)
         (9/26): Republic Book 3 (beginning to 403c)

Week 6 (10/1): Republic Books 3-4 (403c-427d)
         (10/3): Republic Book 4 (427d-434c)

Week 7 (10/10): Republic Book 4 (434d-end)

***First essay due Monday, 10/14, 8 AM***

Week 8 (10/15): Nicomachean Ethics Book 1 (1-5, 7-8, 10)
         (10/17): Ethics Book 1 (13), Book 2 (1-5)

Week 9 (10/22): Ethics Book 2 (6-9)
         (10/24): Ethics Book 3 (6-12)

Week 10 (10/29): Ethics Book 4 (1-3)
         (10/31): Ethics Book 10 (6-9)

Week 11 (11/5): Utilitarianism 1
         (11/7): Utilitarianism 2

Week 12 (11/12): Utilitarianism 3-4
         (11/14): Utilitarianism 5 (No class – alternate assignment)

***Second essay due Monday, 11/18, 8 AM***

Week 13 (11/19): Republic Book 5 (beginning to 466d)
         (11/21): Republic Books 5-6 (473d-487a)

Week 14 (11/26): Republic Book 8 (beginning to 555b)

Week 15 (12/3): Republic Book 8 (555b-end)
         (12/5): Republic Book 9 (beginning to 580b, 588b-end)

Week 16 (12/10): On Liberty 1-2 (pp. 3-45)
         (12/12): On Liberty 2 (pp. 45-70)

***Final Exam: Tuesday, 12/17, 8:30-10:20 (sect. 24) / Thursday, 12/19, 10:30-12:20 (sect. 26) / Tuesday, 12/17,
1:00-2:50 (sect. 21)***