100-17 Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy

Timothy Brownlee
PHIL100 - 17 – ETHICS AS INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:00PM & Friday 2:30-4PM or by appointment  
Class Meeting Time: TR 1-2:15PM, Hailstones 5  
Section Number: 17

Note: Please include the course and section number in the subject line of any email correspondence.

COURSE AIMS

The central aim of this course is to understand what makes a human life good. We shall ask which lives are worth living and why, and whether leading a good life requires asking these questions in the first place.

The point of departure for our inquiry into the human good will be Plato’s Republic. In the Republic, Socrates argues that the good life is one that is lived in accordance with the demands of justice, and we will investigate, in some detail, Socrates’ arguments for this important claim. However, we will also engage with the challenges to Socrates’ view raised by David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. We will focus on relevant similarities and differences between their accounts of the human good and that of Plato. We shall focus specifically on questions concerning the role that justice plays in constituting the good life for human beings.

ETHICS, RELIGION, AND SOCIETY

This course is part of the Xavier Ethics, Religion, and Society program, and satisfies a course requirement in that program. As part of the E/RS program, this course is intended to promote reflection on questions of moral significance. For those interested, more information about E/RS can be found at their web site: http://www.xavier.edu/ers/

To this end, this course works to contribute in an essential way to the central goals and objectives of the E/RS program: Students will be intellectually, morally and spiritually educated individuals capable of critical reflection on ethical and/or religious questions of social significance from the perspective of multiple disciplines with unique methods. Students will analyze rationally competing claims about individual and political justice within foundational philosophical texts (Goal 7, Objective 1)

XAVIER CORE CURRICULUM

This course satisfies one or more requirements in Xavier University’s Core Curriculum. We shall aim to accomplish the following significant goals:

1. First and foremost, students will be inaugurated into a grand tradition of reflection on philosophical questions that animate the intellectual life of the western world from the middle of the first millennium BC up until the present day. Students will come to consider the connections between great texts from the history of philosophy and other significant scientific, moral, cultural, political, and spiritual contributions drawn from our shared history. (Goal 4, Objective 2 especially)

2. Students will develop the ability to engage in thoughtful reflection on questions of moral significance, and to articulate a coherent ethical perspective on the world and their place in it. Students will learn to relate their understanding and thinking in a relevant and constructive way to their own experiences and to the contemporary world. They will be responsible in articulating the views of others in their writing and speech. (Goal 5, Objectives 2 and 3)

3. Students will be intelligent questioners. They will be able to reflect thoughtfully on fundamental questions arising from the human condition, such as questions about the grounds of morality, the essence of justice, the nature of reality, the possibility of certainty, the nature of beauty, or the reasonableness of
religion. Students will be able to analyze and interpret great texts, and to evaluate the strength of an argument or claim and its evidence. (Goal 2, Objectives 1, 3, and 4)

4. Students will be effective communicators both orally and in writing. They will be able to organize and express their ideas, formulate clear and arguable theses, supported by evidence drawn from appropriate sources, and utilize an effective writing process guided by audience, purpose, cultural context, and disciplinary standards. (Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, and 3)

5. Students will be thoughtful, creative, and critical agents of inquiry, discovery, and expression in new domains of knowledge. Students will utilize their imagination and creativity, individually and collectively, to innovate and generate new perspectives to problems. (Goal 3, Objective 1)

REQUIRED WORKS


Singer, Peter. “Equality for Animals?” Practical Ethics, 2nd Ed. New York: Cambridge, 55-82. [available online]

GRADE BREAKDOWN

1st short paper 20%
2nd short paper 20%
Midterm examination 20%
Final examination 20%
Quizzes 10%
Participation 10%

PAPERS

Students will be required to write two short papers (4-6 pages each). Lists of possible questions will be distributed in lecture at least two weeks prior to the paper due dates. For the first paper, students will be required to submit their introductory paragraph. The aim of these papers is to provide an indication of the extent to which you understand the works that we study in the course. For this reason, they will be primarily exegetical (or interpretive). You will be asked to restate, in your own words, the position of the author under question on a specific issue, and the argument that that author puts forth to defend that view. The instructor will be happy to discuss the criteria on the basis of which these papers will be assessed during office hours.

Consultation of secondary sources (i.e. anything but the text under consideration) is strongly discouraged.

Papers should be typed submitted to the relevant Turn it in link at the start of class on the due date provided on the assignment sheet. Papers submitted after class begins will be deemed late. Late papers are subject to a deduction of 0.3 grade points per day for up to three days. Papers not yet submitted after three days will not be accepted, and the student will be awarded a grade of “F” for that assignment.

Students are required to maintain a digital backup of all submitted work until the end of the semester. The instructor reserves the right to request a digital copy of any work submitted by the student.

ALL STUDENTS MUST COMPLETE BOTH PAPER ASSIGNMENTS. STUDENTS WHO FAIL TO DO SO WILL RECEIVE A GRADE OF “F” IN THE COURSE.

EXAMINATIONS
The midterm and final examinations will concern substantive issues covered in the course. The final examination will be cumulative. The majority of the examinations will consist in essay questions. Students will receive a handout outlining the examination structure and format roughly two weeks prior to the scheduled date.

**QUIZZES**

Students will complete quizzes through the course Canvas site. Quizzes will become available Thursdays at 2:15PM and remain available until 11:59PM the following Monday. They will concern material from the prior week’s readings and class discussions, and the readings for the Tuesday following the quiz. The aim of the quizzes will be to test student familiarity with the materials covered in the readings and in the study questions posted on the course web site. Students are, of course, expected to keep up with the course readings.

**PARTICIPATION**

This portion of your grade will be assigned based on the extent of your participation in class. It will be based on the frequency with which you provide valuable contributions to class discussion, which includes asking relevant or cogent questions, as well as your general attentiveness and engagement with the course material. *Since much of the class will proceed by discussion of specific passages in the course texts it is imperative that you bring the week’s readings to class with you.*

**TOPICS COVERED**

Note that the schedule provided in this document constitutes a rough outline of the specific schedule. Students are required to consult the course website through the My Courses tab of the Xavier on line portal for detailed breakdowns of the week’s readings. These breakdowns will be updated weekly and will include suggested study questions.

Materials listed in the following schedule that do not appear on the required texts list will be available by electronic reserve through the Xavier portal.

Weeks 1-7: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1.1-2 and I.2.1-3; Plato, *Republic* I-IV (First paper questions distributed Tuesday, January 28; Intro paragraph and paper outline due Tuesday, February 4; First paper due Thursday, February 13; Mid-term examination Thursday, February 27)

Weeks 9-11: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* I-V, IX (Spring Break Holiday week of March 3, Class does not meet)

Weeks 11-13: Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”; *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Second paper questions distributed Tuesday, March 25; Second paper due Tuesday, April 8)

Weeks 14-16: Mill, *Utilitarianism* I, II, V; Singer, “Equality for Animals” (Easter Holiday Thursday, April 17, class does not meet)

Week 17: Final examination Thursday, May 8, 10:30AM-12:20PM

**COURSE POLICIES**

**ATTENDANCE**

Attendance in class is mandatory. Students are expected to arrive promptly at the start of class, prepared actively to engage with the course material.

Students are permitted up to four (4) absences per semester. *Every two times a student is late to class, they will have one absence counted against this total.* After the fourth absence, each successive class missed will result in a final grade reduction of 0.3 grade points. For example, a student who has earned the grade of B but missed 5 classes would receive a B-, one who has missed 6 classes would receive a C+, and so on.

Any classes missed due to otherwise-sanctioned university activity, minor illness, or any other reason will count against this total of four absences. Students who anticipate missing a number of classes for any of these reasons should take special care to attend otherwise. Exceptions will be issued only in order to observe a religious holiday.
In the event of extreme illness, it is imperative that students make arrangements to meet with the professor to discuss their ability to complete the minimum requirements of the course. While I am willing to make arrangements to enable students to complete the course successfully, in the event that the student has missed a significant portion of the class, it may be impossible for them to complete the course. Concerned students should contact the professor as soon as possible.

A special note for student athletes: While students will be excused from class to attend sanctioned athletic events, student athletes must be especially careful not to miss additional, unnecessary classes. While student athletes will be subject to no penalties not applied to other students in the class for absences, frequent attendance is absolutely essential for student athletes to keep up with the remainder of the class.

Equally importantly, student athletes should, in no way, go out of their way to inform the instructor of their performance issues in other classes, or indicate what grade they “need” from this course in order to continue playing the sport in which they choose to participate. The instructor is aware of the university policies regulating student athlete academic performance, and regards any efforts to influence his assessment of student performance in the course as highly inappropriate.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
Students are expected to arrive for class on time and prepared to contribute actively to the class discussion. Timely arrival and preparedness include addressing bodily needs (such as snacking and restroom use) prior to the start of class.

Use of electronic devices of any kind in class is prohibited, except in cases of documented need.

Obviously unacceptable in-class behaviors include: internet viewing, text-messaging, napping, and conversation of issues not related to the class discussion.

ACADEMIC HONESTY
The Xavier University Catalog states (http://www.xavier.edu/registrar/ugrd_policies.html#Academic_honesty):
“The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based on integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of 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 materials submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic records 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 the full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course.”

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. The instructor requires that students submit their written work both in hard copy to the instructor on the due date and to TURNITIN.

All students must complete the plagiarism tutorial on the library web site in advance of the due date for their first paper. Links to this tutorial can be found on the course web site.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN WORK
The Philosophy Department has adopted the following standards for the evaluation of all forms of written work:

A = Work that not merely fully and accurately reproduces class discussion, the main thread in the argument or the major philosophical significance under discussion, but which goes beyond these and indicates a contribution of the student, giving evidence of a 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, but without advancing beyond these explanations.

C = Work that shows a basic understanding of the material but with errors, omissions and confusions of either a formal or contextual nature.

D = Work that shows a minimal acquaintance with the material, or serious logical or conceptual flaws in formulating responses to the question raised, the argument at issue, or the philosophical text under discussion.

F = Work that indicates inadequate acquaintance with texts, issues, or ideas with little or no valid argumentation; or the work is handed in beyond the point of acceptance or else plagiarized. Cases of plagiarism, which involves the use of published work or other written material without proper citation, must be given a ‘0’.