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389-02 Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy

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ETHICS AS INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy is a rational, critical examination of human excellence and the human good, morality and its foundations, and the role morality plays in the human condition. We will explore general, foundational issues such as:

- What is human excellence?
- Is there such a thing as a highest human good and highest end in human life?
- What facilitates and inhibits moral action?
- Does character matter or is knowledge of right and wrong all I need to be good?
- Why should I bother being good, any way?
- Are there objective criteria by which to judge human excellence and moral worth?
- What sorts of life are best and most choice worthy, and whether rational reflection is crucial for leading an excellent life.

We begin with Plato’s Republic, the central question of which is the nature of justice and whether justice and the best human life are co-implicatory. We then shift attention to Kant’s Grounding. Are there objective principles of moral obligation? What determines whether an action is good or not? What grants an action moral worth? Is ethics subjective if there are competing, equally compelling sources of moral obligation and goodness? We then shift back to Plato to consider what sort of life is the best life. If time permits, we will consider the moral standard of utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill and how utility impacts on justice.

COURSE GOALS

1. Students will become conversant with and appropriate 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 and equally 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 their ability to analyze, critique, and formulate reasoned accounts both in writing and in speech.
6. Students will practice and improve skill at reading and understanding difficult, argumentative texts.

PHIL 100 fulfills one of four requirements within the Ethics/Religion & Society (E/RS) component of the core curriculum. The E/RS component fosters students' understanding of socially significant issues from the perspective of the liberal arts, especially literature, philosophy, and theology, but also from the perspectives of the social and natural sciences. Visit the E/RS homepage at [http://www.xavier.edu/ers/index.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/ers/index.cfm). For more information on the core curriculum, visit: [http://www.xavier.edu/cas/core.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/cas/core.cfm).
REQUIRED TEXTS

- [http://www.mesacc.edu/~davpy35701/text/kant-sup-right-to-lie.pdf](http://www.mesacc.edu/~davpy35701/text/kant-sup-right-to-lie.pdf) (free)

*E-books and readers are not permitted except in cases of documented medical need.*

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADE PERCENTAGES

(A) Papers 50%

1st Paper (Plato) 20%, due week 7. *Feedback provided if requested.*

2nd Paper (Kant) 30%, due week 14. *Little to no feedback will be provided.*

Students are required to write two papers, 92 to 115 lines each. Papers provide two measures: 1) a measure of the level of reflection and understanding of philosophical issues in a text and 2) a measure of ability to formulate, articulate, and defend a position through reasoned argumentation. Students must submit papers to TURNITIN on the course Canvas site before 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.

(B) Quizzes 20%

There will be at least 6 short, automated quizzes over the assigned readings on Canvas. Quizzes measure the extent to which students are actively reflecting on the assigned readings. Quizzes *should* not be difficult if reading assignments have been attended to with care. Format will vary between fill in the blank, true/false, and multiple-choice. Quizzes are time limited to 10 minutes to a time frame to be determined by the instructor. Students may not use any secondary source, their books, the internet, or each other when taking quizzes.

(C) Final Exam 20%

There will be a cumulative final exam based on reading assignments and class discussion. Format to be determined.

(D) Participation 10%

The participation grade is not a freebie. *If you say nothing constructive and contribute nothing constructive to class discussion, you will not be awarded any credit. Period.*

Students must demonstrate active engagement with the material throughout the semester *in class*. Students must arrive promptly with the assigned reading, be prepared, and be ready to reflect on and discuss the assigned material.

Participation grades student attentiveness in class and the quantity and the quality of the contribution to class discussion. Quality contribution includes asking for clarification of passages in the reading or explanations offered by the instructor or other students, providing questions or commentary that push discussion toward a more nuanced and probing exploration of the text and issue under consideration, and relevant and constructive criticism of the philosopher, instructor (yes, feel free to criticize *me*) and other students. Always seek to understand a position before grinding an axe about it.

In order to provide quality contributions, careful reading and reflection of the assigned material is necessary. Taking good notes and answering the reading questions should ensure the ability to
excel in class participation and on quizzes. For the very shy, I have office hours and am available by appointment.

Nodding off, staring out the window, working on assignments from other classes, playing on a smart phone or texting, discussing something irrelevant to class with one’s neighbor, and being generally disengaged, inattentive, disruptive, or distracting to others will reduce the participation score and possibly the final grade according to the instructor’s prerogative.

(E) Grading and Criteria for Assessment of Written Work
Students earn grades in accordance with the merit of the work they do. According to Xavier’s undergraduate grading scale, excellent work earns an A, good work a B, average (satisfactory) work a C, poor work a D, and failing work earns an F. The grading scale in this course is plus/minus. The instructor takes these measurements seriously. Only excellent work, and not merely good work, earns an A. Only above average work, not average work earns a B. This syllabus outlines the grade percentages for assignments so students have all that they need to calculate their grade. Students are responsible for being aware of their standing in the course. I do not accept requests for grade calculation.

The Philosophy Department uses the following standards for evaluation 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 submitted 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’.

COURSE POLICIES
(A) Attendance
Students must attend class regularly and arrive on time. 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. Students caught signing in for others will lose all participation credit for both themselves as well as those for whom they signed in.

Generally, absences are excused only for documented and officially sanctioned university activities, documented illness, or documented family emergencies. Your responsibilities are many, however, and it may at times be prudent to miss this class for the sake of another
obligation. Therefore, students are allowed to miss up to, but not beyond, four (4) classes without penalty. Thereafter, each class missed without official sanction or documentation will result in the loss of two (2) points from the final grade. **9 absences, no matter what the reason or cause, officially sanctioned or not, will result in automatic failure for the course.** Late arrival, if it becomes habitual, will be treated as an unexcused absence. **Office hours are not an alternative class time for those who miss class without just cause.** Any in-class assignments missed due to absence may be made up if and only if a student misses class due to an officially sanctioned university activity, documentable illness, or documentable family emergency.

**B) Email**

Please include your name and course (PHIL 100 ##) in the subject line of any correspondence to ensure that I do not accidentally delete your email before reading it.

Email does not substitute for class or office hours. If you have a question or desire help that will require nuanced, lengthy answers and analysis, email is not the appropriate medium. See me during office hours or make an appointment. E.g., email is not the appropriate medium for discussing the entire draft of your paper before you turn it in. However, if you have particular questions about particular points in your draft or particular questions about an assignment or a particular passage or a particular issue, I am happy to respond with a particular answer by email. I do not discuss grades, including the final grade, by email. I am happy to discuss your grade on any assignment in person. Students have every right to understand why they earned a grade.

**C) Smart Phones, etc.**

Use of electronic devices in class is **strictly prohibited** (including laptop computers, tablets, and e-readers) except in cases of documented medical need. **Students observed playing on an electronic device in class will lose 1 point from the final grade for each infraction.**

**D) Classroom Etiquette**

In our discussions I will push you to justify your opinions so that we may begin to move away from mere opinion toward knowledge. When I badger you to speak up and justify why you think as you do, it is because I wish us to philosophize together. We will be polite to one another, but will insist also on being fair to the truth. **In philosophy, there is no inherent right to hold an opinion; we must earn our opinions by justifying them.**

If you find yourself lost during or after class discussion, do not keep your perplexity to yourself! Ask another student or make an appointment to see me or stop by during office hours. It is imprudent to let shyness or, worse, vanity before peers keep us from speaking up when we do not understand something! Philosophy is difficult, so we must be fearless about admitting that we do not understand and be stubborn about gaining understanding.

**E) Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism or cheating of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a zero for the assignment or failure for the course. The Xavier University catalog states:

> 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. (http://www.xavier.edu/library/help/academic_honesty.cfm)

**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.**

All students must:
(1) Complete the plagiarism tutorial on the library’s web site (http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/index.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.

(F) **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.