2014

100-02-03 Ethics as an Introduction to Philosophy

James Wood

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PHIL 100: Ethics as an Introduction to Philosophy, Spring 2014
Sections 02 / 03
MWF 9:00-9:50 / 10:00-10:50
Classroom: Hailstones 101

Instructor: James L. Wood
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Phone: 745-4955
Office Hours: MWF 11-12, F 1-4 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. Our primary focus will be some classic texts from antiquity and the modern era, but we will also have occasion to view a film and consider some artifacts from our own culture, while pausing along the way to take stock of our developing thoughts on the nature of justice and a well-ordered community. We will begin our reading with the first part of Plato's investigation of justice and virtue in both individuals and political communities in the Republic, while comparing his account to some key passages in the Hebrew Bible and Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War. Then we will study Aristotle's account of the link between virtue and happiness in the Nicomachean Ethics. Next we will take up a competing ethical theory on the nature of happiness, 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. Here we will return briefly to Thucydides to read his “Funeral Oration,” one of the most famous speeches in praise of Athens, the model of ancient democracy. We will conclude with selections from Mill’s On Liberty, one of the most eloquent and powerful modern defenses of liberty and individuality.

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 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. 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. Reading philosophy is

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. You can find the official goals and objectives of Xavier’s Core Curriculum on Canvas.
not like reading a novel; slow and careful reading is essential, and re-reading is often necessary, so I recommend devoting a substantial amount of time to read, re-read, and take notes on each day’s assigned text. 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. I also recommend buying all your texts as soon as possible, since the bookstore sometimes sells out and does not hold all books until the end of the semester. You may, of course, order your texts elsewhere. I do not recommend renting or selling back your books. These options are designed to make the bookstore more money. Sure, you can save a few bucks, but these books don’t cost much and are genuinely great books, worth keeping for your entire life and reading repeatedly. Rent or sell back textbooks that will become obsolete. Do yourself a favor and keep the books from your liberal arts courses.

We will read the following philosophers and texts this semester:

The Bible (any edition; many are available online)

2. **Writing:**

*Essays:* You will write two formal essays (due dates on reading schedule). I’ll give you topics and guidelines later. You must submit your paper electronically on 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 your papers if you (1) discuss your paper both with me and with a tutor at the Writing Center (see www.xavier.edu/writing_center), (2) turn in the revised paper no later than two weeks after receiving the graded original, and (3) append a paragraph explaining how you sought to improve the paper in light of my feedback, oral and written, and that of the writing tutor. The grade of the rewrite will replace the grade of the original. I will never lower the grade, but I reserve the right not to raise it if in my judgment your improvements are merely superficial.

Each essay will be graded on a rubric according to six criteria: thoughtfulness, organization, understanding of material, use of text, analysis and argumentation, and writing mechanics and style. I’ll explain these criteria in more detail the first week of classes.

*Journals:* Throughout the semester you will keep a journal on Canvas, with one entry of 1-2 pages due each week (you may skip up to three without penalty; I will grade your 12 best). The purpose of the journal is to encourage you to think through the material as you read it, so that you will understand and appreciate it better and be better prepared for class discussion. For each entry, you should comment on some aspect of the reading that you found interesting, questionable, or problematic. Don’t try to write about the reading as a whole. You may explore a question that you have about the text (or that the text itself raises), advance a line of criticism, develop a possible interpretation, compare an idea from the text to something outside the text, or write in a more creative vein inspired by the material. Whatever you do, I want to see evidence of your active thinking in relation to the reading. I do NOT want to read mere summaries of the material; those are boring for me to read and for you to write. And unless I say otherwise, you MUST write in relation to the reading; don’t just toss out your opinions or make only very vague connections to the text. Sometimes I may ask you to write on a specific issue or question; if not, you may write on anything you like from the assigned material. Entries can be submitted at any time during the week, but must be submitted by the end of the week (Friday by 11:59 PM) to receive credit. Each entry will be graded according to four criteria: thoughtfulness, thoroughness, clarity, and understanding of material. I’ll explain these criteria in more detail the first week of classes. In addition, all entries will be viewable by your classmates; this will provide an opportunity for you to learn from each other. To encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity, you may earn additional points on your weekly entry (between .05 and .2) if you offer substantive comments to a fellow classmate’s entry before the following Monday’s class.

2. **Discussion:**

Philosophy depends on active participation in dialogue. Consequently, class participation makes up a significant percentage of your final grade. Participation generally consists of asking and answering questions, making comments, and at the very least appearing interested and engaged in what is being said by others. 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 participation 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). I will take improvement into account in determining your final participation grade.
Extra participation credit: While your participation grade will be primarily determined by your contribution to class discussion, 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.
3) Volunteer to peer review a classmate’s essay. You must volunteer to do this no later than the day the paper is due, and you must submit your review no later than 48 hours after the due date. All papers are subject to being reviewed (anonymously), but I will assign those of students who are intending to revise their papers first, should prioritization prove necessary.

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 3 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. I will not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, but I will give you the opportunity to make up an absence. If you want to make up an absence, you will need to come talk to me about the class material AND write a one-page paper about the material for that class; this is in addition to your required journal entry and cannot simply repeat what you say there (or vice-versa). However, any student who misses 12 or more classes (i.e., 4 weeks and more than ⅛ 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. Protocols:

Twice during the semester I will ask each of you, in pairs, to compose and present “protocols,” which are detailed summaries or minutes of the class meetings. This will involve jotting down key points from that day’s class, writing them up into a form fit for class presentation, and then presenting them at the beginning of the next class. The note-takers, and only the note-takers (see class policies below), will be allowed to use a computer during class to take notes. The note-takers will need to compare notes before the following class and compose a joint report on the previous class that they will take turns presenting the following class. After the presentation the note-takers will be responsible for taking questions from me and from the class about any points raised in the protocol. That report should be emailed to me before the beginning of class; I will post it to Canvas, where everyone in the class will be able to read it. It is not necessary to follow a standard format—detailed outlines are fine, as are fully written out reports—but do be sure to include at the top your names as well as the date of the class you are reviewing. Protocols will be assessed based on their thoroughness, accuracy, and clarity, as modified by the effectiveness of the note-takers at presenting them and responding to questions.

4. Exam:

There will be a final exam due the assigned date for your section (see end of syllabus). I will give you more information in due course.

Grading:

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

Note: I use the 4 point grading scale (the same one used for your GPA). On that scale 4=A, 3.67=A-, 3.33=B+, 3=B, 2.67=B-, 2.33=C+, 2=C, 1.67=C-, etc. Some grades may fall in between two of these numbers, in which case I will indicate your letter grade as falling in between the two. I will not round up or down until I calculate your final grades. At that point I will round up or down to the nearest letter grade mark (e.g. a 3.17 becomes a B+, a 3.16 becomes a B). However, in borderline cases I will take into account your overall effort and commitment, as well as your improvement over the course of the semester.
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:

Week 1 (1/13): Introduction: Building Kallipolis, the “Beautiful City”
(1/15): Republic Book 1 (beginning to 331d) and Exodus 20.1-20
(1/17): Republic Book 1 (331d-336a), Genesis 18.16-33, and Exodus 21-23

Week 2 (1/22): Republic Book 1 (336b-344c)
(1/24): Thucydides (Ch. 4, 66-75 and Ch. 6, 102-109)

Week 3 (1/27): Republic Book 1 (344d-end)
(1/29): Discussion: What is Justice? Is it better to be Just or Unjust?
(1/31): Republic Book 2 (357a-367e)

Week 4 (2/3): Republic Book 2 (368a-376d) and Genesis 2.4-3
(2/5): Republic Books 2-3 (376d-392a)
(2/7): Republic Book 3 (392a-403c)

Week 5 (2/10): Building Kallipolis, Pt. 2: Music and Culture
(2/12): Republic Book 3 (403c-417b)
(2/14): Republic Book 4 (427d-434c)

Week 6 (2/17): Republic Book 4 (434d-441c)
(2/19): Republic Book 4 (441c-445d)
(2/21): Nicomachean Ethics Book 1 (1-5)

***First essay due Saturday, 2/22, 8 AM***

Week 7 (2/24): Ethics Book 1 (7-8, 10)
(2/26): Film: Happy

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3 Subject to change over the course of the semester.
(2/28): *Happy*, pt. 2

***Spring Break 3/3-3/7***

Week 8 (3/10): *Ethics* Book 1 (13), Book 2 (1-5)  
(3/12): *Ethics* Book 2 (6-9)  
(3/14): *Ethics* Book 3 (6-9)

Week 9 (3/17): *Ethics* Book 3 (10-12)  
(3/19): *Ethics* Book 4 (1-3)  
(3/21): *Ethics* Book 8 (1-3)

Week 10 (3/24): *Utilitarianism* Chapters 1-2 (153-167)  
(3/26): *Utilitarianism* Chapter 2 (167-185)  
(3/28): Applications

***Second essay due Monday, 3/31, 8 AM***

Week 11 (3/31): *Republic* Book 5 (473d-480a)  
(4/2): *Republic* Book 6 (484a-487a)  
(4/4): *Republic* Book 6 (502c-507a)

Week 12 (4/7): *Republic* Books 6 (507b-511e)  
(4/9): *Republic* Book 7 (514a-521c)  
(4/11): *Republic* Book 8 (543a-555b)

Week 13 (4/14): *Republic* Book 8 (555b-end)  
(4/16): *Thucydides* Chapter 3 (pp. 39-46, 52-58)

***Easter Break 4/17-4/21***

Week 14 (4/23): *On Liberty* Chapter 1 (3-20)  
[No Class—Alternate Assignment]

(4/30): *On Liberty* Chapter 4 (96-120)  
(5/2): Building *Kallipolis*, pt. 3: Virtue versus Liberty

***Final Exam: Friday, May 9th, 8:00-9:50 (sect. 02) or Wednesday, May 7th, 10:00-11:50 (sect. 03)***