

PHIL100: Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2008

Section: 22

Meeting Times: MWF 12:30 PM – 1:20 PM

Instructor: Dr. Anthony Reeves

Email: reevesa@xavier.edu

Office: Hinkle Hall 213

Phone: 513-745-2023

Office Hours: Monday 2:30 – 4:00 PM; Tuesday 10:00 – 11:00 AM; Wednesday 2:30 – 4:00 PM

I will be in my office and available during office hours, but you can make appointments to see me at other times. My preference is that we make appointments by email, and have substantive discussions face-to-face.

Course Description

This course is an introduction to philosophical ethics. Although morality is a common feature of our lives, we often have difficulty addressing moral questions when they arise. We frequently talk about right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust; but we have trouble saying exactly what we are talking about when we use these terms. Moreover, it is often unclear how we should deal with ethical questions when there is disagreement or lack of clarity. In this course, we will work to achieve a philosophical perspective on some basic moral problems, including: “What sort of life should I live?”; “What is justice?”; “Why should I care about doing what’s right?”; “What makes something ‘good’?”; “How much should I care about others that are in need?”. In addition to achieving a greater understanding of these and other moral issues, students should improve their writing and reading skills, their ability to reason through and intelligently talk about difficult problems generally, and their aptitude for analyzing arguments.

Texts

Compared with some of your other classes, there is not a great deal of reading required for this course. However, some of the passages are quite difficult and will have to be read with care. You will often find that you have to read assigned passages more than once in order to fully understand them.

The required texts for the course are:

Plato, *Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett)

Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Hackett)

George Sher (ed.), *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings*, 2nd Edition, (Wadsworth, 2001)

Requirements

Grade Breakdown:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| 1st Short Paper (4-6 pages) | 15% |
| Mid-Term Exam | 20% |
| 2nd Short Paper (4-6 pages) | 30% |
| Final Examination | 25% |
| Class Participation | 10% |

Papers: Students will be required to write two short papers. Paper topics for each will be distributed at least two weeks before the due date. Papers should be written in 12-point, double-spaced text with margins of 1 inch, and submitted at the start of class on the due date provided on the assignment sheet. Late papers are subject to a deduction of a third of a grade per day of lateness (e.g. a 'B' becomes a "B-").

I will discuss how to write a philosophy paper when topics are first distributed. In general, however, papers will be assessed on the basis of: (1) accuracy and completeness in portraying the material in question, and (2) the development of a well-reasoned assessment of that material. These tasks are more difficult than they at first appear and some effort should be invested into paper writing.

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

Exams: There will be a mid-term and a final exam. Students are responsible for all assigned material up to the day of the exam (i.e., the final exam is cumulative). The exams will consist of short answer and essay questions.

Participation: Students will be assessed on their contributions in class. The grade will be based on the frequency with which the students provide valuable verbal contributions to the class. Such contributions include informed participation in classroom discussions and asking relevant and cogent questions.

Course Policies

Attendance: Attendance in class is mandatory. Students should arrive promptly at the beginning of class with the assigned reading for the day in hand. Students are permitted up to five (5) unexcused absences per semester. *Every two times a student is late to class, they will have one absence counted against this total.* After the fifth absence, each successive class missed will result in the student's *final grade* being reduced by a third.

Exceptions will be made for documented absences due to otherwise sanctioned university activity, for observation of religious holidays, due to serious illness (the instructor reserves the right to request documentation from the student's doctor), or due to a family emergency. Students who miss classes for any of these reasons should consult me as far in advance as possible.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will be dealt with harshly in accordance with Xavier's policies. All cases will be reported to the dean.

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 or 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."

Schedule of Readings

The following plan is subject to revision, I will inform the class of any changes as we go. Listed on the left are the dates of the lectures, on the right are the readings that will be discussed on those dates.

Aug. 27: Introductory Lecture

Aug. 29: Plato, *Republic*, 327a – 336b (1-12) [Book I]

Sept. 3: Plato, 336b – 343a (12-20) [Book I]

Sept. 5: Plato, 343a – 350d (20-30) [Book I]

Sept. 8: Plato, 350d – 362d (30-40) [Books I, II]

Sept. 10: Plato, 362d – 372c (40-51) [Book II]

Sept. 12: Plato, 372c – 376d, 382a – 382e (51-56, 63-64) [Book II]

Sept. 15: Plato, 412b – 415e, 427e – 429a (96-100, 112-114) [Book III, IV]

Sept. 17: Plato, 429a – 434d (114-121) [Book IV]

Sept. 19: Plato, 434d – 440e (121-128) [Book IV]

Sept. 22: Plato, 440e – 445e (128-135) [Book IV]

Sept. 24: Plato, 450b – 457c (136-146) [Book V]; **First Paper Assigned**

Sept. 26: Plato, 571a – 580d (270-281) [Book IX]

Sept. 29: Plato, 580d – 587c (281-290) [Book IX]

Oct. 1: Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1-5 [Preface]

[Recommended: Translators Introduction, v – xiii]

Oct. 3: Kant, 7 – 12 [First Section]

Oct. 6: Kant, 12 – 17 [First Section]

Oct. 8: Kant, 19 – 23 [Second Section]; **First Paper Due**

Oct. 13: Kant, 24 – 32 [Second Section]

Oct. 15: Kant, 32 – 38 [Second Section]

Oct. 17: Kant, 39 – 48 [Second Section]

All further readings are from George Sher's *Moral Philosophy: Selected Readings*.

Oct. 20: Nagel, "Moral Luck," 441 – 452 [33]

Oct. 22: Nagel

Oct. 24: **Mid-Term Exam**

Oct. 27: Mill, "Utilitarianism," 298 – 312 [23]

Oct. 29: Mill

Oct. 31: Hare, "What is Wrong with Slavery," 313 – 326

Nov. 3: Hare

Nov. 5: Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," 353-363 [27]

Nov. 7: Williams; **Second Paper Assigned**

Nov. 10: Watch Movie: *Gone Baby Gone*

Nov. 12: *Gone Baby Gone*

Nov. 14: *Gone Baby Gone*; Discussion

Nov. 17: Nozick, "The Experience Machine," 612 – 614 [44]

Nov. 19: Rawls, "A Theory of Justice," 453 – 460 [34]

Nov. 21: Rawls, "A Theory of Justice," 460 – 467 [34]

Nov. 24: Rawls, "A Theory of Justice," 468 – 472 [34]; **Second Paper Due**

Dec. 1: Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," 720 – 728 [53]

Dec. 3: Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," 728 – 734 [53]

Dec. 5: Feinberg, "Abortion and the Conflict of Claims," 735 – 748 [54]

Dec. 8: Feinberg

Dec. 10: Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 694 – 704

Dec. 12: Singer

Final Exam: 1:00 PM – 2:50 PM on Wednesday, Dec. 17th