Philosophical Ethics

(Service Learning-Integrated Section)

PHIL 3000

Course packet

Instructor: John Davenport
Fall 2010
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3. Selections from Kant’s *Lectures on Ethics*
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Everyday Ethics and Philosophical Ethics: The term “ethics” has two distinct senses. It can refer to common beliefs about right and wrong actions or better and worse life-goals that may just be implicit in our practices and interactions most of the time, even if we rarely reflect on them. Such beliefs play some role in the thought of virtually every sane adult person – in that sense, everyone has “an ethics” of some kind, even if they don’t explicitly formulate it. We make choices about actions that affect others; we have attitudes about appropriate actions and goals, long-term commitments, jobs, intimate relationships, family life, and political priorities; we react negatively and positively to actions by others on grounds other than pure self-interest, it seems. In particular, we make ethical assessments about three kinds of topic:

- types of action (e.g. the assessments embodied in our criminal codes)
- character-traits, dispositions, or types of motives that affect a person’s moral worth
- laws, political policies, types of government institution (perhaps also cultural traditions)

Philosophical ethics is the critical study of such judgments and the norms and ideals we use to solve practical problems and to lead worthwhile and decent lives. In this sense, “ethics” is the systematic attempt to articulate our views about these matters, to develop coherent sets of principles or ideals on which to base our ethical judgments, and to explain their grounds or justify them. Thus the goal of philosophical ethics is to defend basic ethical ideals and norms from which a broader set of criteria for practical judgments about actions, characters, and institutions can be generated. The greatest ethical thinkers in history have sought to explain the moral perspective, to uncover objective bases or foundations for the values we can use in deciding how to live, what actions to praise and blame, and which institutions to foster. In the process, they have addressed questions of great importance to human beings both as individuals and as members of societies. For example:

- is there an objective difference between right and wrong, good and evil?
- what is worth living for? what is worth caring about? is this based only on our desires?
- what is true human happiness? Should I simply do whatever I enjoy most?
- do the interests of others limit what I may legitimately do in pursuing my chosen goals?
- are human beings “psychological egoists” whose motives are all self-interested, or can we select and alter our goals in light of the interests or rights of others valued for their own sake?
- what basic legal arrangements are just and unjust in social life?
- does religion provide the basis for ethics, or is morality logically independent of faith?
**Ethical Theory.** Many people assume that the answers to these questions -- like judgments about actions, character, and institutions -- must be mere matters of opinion or sheer personal preference, like preferring apple to cherry pie. But none of the most famous writers on ethics in history have endorsed such simplistic subjectivism. Instead, they have generally held that ethical questions are amenable to serious logical analysis and argument, even if the *ultimate sources* of ethical norms are based in some way on human psychology. We cannot just uncritically assume our inherited values, nor just assert our judgments as a brute preference; they must and can be defended. When we try to defend our moral opinions, we are forced to address deeper underlying questions such as:

—what distinguishes moral norms and ethical ideals from other sorts of principles?
—what kind of generally acceptable grounds could there be for moral claims?
—are duties and ideals of virtue based on reason or sentiment, thinking or passion, or both?
—is egoism or selfishness compatible with political justice or not?
—are there basic rights, and what limits should we set on social and economic inequalities?

**Course Goals:** Ethics can thus be approached from several different angles. While this course introduces the main philosophical theories of ethics that have influenced western history, we will also focus on applications to important social questions that connect with the service-learning opportunities that you will take up this semester. In the process, students will be introduced to different theoretical accounts of the basis of morality, such as:

- classical eudaimonist conceptions of virtue,
- deontological or rights-based approaches,
- utilitarianism,
- mixed theories and agapic virtue ethics.

Through reading, written analysis, class debate, and reflection on your service learning work, you will learn how these main ethical theories apply to serious practical questions and problems in private and public life. We will discuss *case studies* in relation to each major theory to assess how well it can guide us.

**Service Component.** Every student in this section will do roughly 3-4 hours of service learning work per week outside the classroom, either in tutoring and guiding students in after-school programs, or in assisting clients in need of legal aid. As a result, some of our discussion will focus on social policy implications of ethical theory that are related to these service opportunities. Likewise, some of our readings concern ethical implications for political philosophy – e.g. possible grounds for human rights, duties to aid others, how to conceive criminal justice, and rights to basic education, the proper goals of education, and fairness in education systems. We will see that each of our main theories – Kantian, utilitarian, and Aristotelian -- offer different insights and often different prescriptions within these three domains of practical issues.

**Critical Reading, Thinking, Questioning.** Finally, a key goal of the course is to learn how to interpret philosophical texts and become familiar with the critical evaluation of value-concepts. Thus *all readings must be completed before class* on the assigned date, so that we can practice such close reading and analysis in class. Since so much of our learning will depend on class discussion, you will be letting others down if you do not keep up with the readings and participate actively in
Don’t be stopped by self-doubt! Even if you are not certain your view is defensible, you should state your opinion or ask your question (others are probably wondering the same thing!).


*Course packet* required for all the other course readings (most are also on E-Res).
You must buy the packet through me: a money order for $20 made out to Fordham reimburses the department duplicating account. This procedure is to save you money by avoiding the high cost of outside suppliers and eres printouts (sorry I can't take checks).

Why you must buy the four inexpensive paperbacks and course packet for this course:
I have a strict policy that students must purchase all books for the class. There is no point in spending $20,000 to go to college and then trying to save $80 per course by not buying books, which makes it almost impossible to do the work well. That is like buying a new car and then refusing to buy the lugnuts for its tires. I order the cheapest copies I can, but you should view course materials each semester as part of the normal cost of college, not as an optional extra.

-- Buy all the books at the start of the semester. The bookstore starts returning unpurchased books as early as mid-February to make room in its limited space for inventory.
-- Keep your books! You should have a small library by the time you finish college, including books you can look back on for the rest of your life. You may not want to keep everything, but don't sell yourself out of this long-term asset by returning all your books for a few bucks.

**Class website:**  www.fordham.edu/philosophy/lc/davenport/ethics10/ethics-home.htm

**Grading System**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service Learning oral report</td>
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<td>Short argument analysis</td>
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<td>Midterm paper</td>
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<td>Compare/contrast paper</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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This breakdown of course components is a rough guide for you, but there is also a certain amount of leeway and credit for improvement in assigning the final grade.

**Requirements:**

**Class Participation:**  This grade depends on two factors:
-- The quality of your questions and contributions in class, including being prepared and able to answer assigned study questions for the day. Be an active contributor, not just a passive listener, and you'll get more out of this material! Philosophy should be fun.
-- Your attendance. If you are absent more than once, you will lose points. Four absences is likely to lower you a whole letter grade. See attendance policy below.
Service Learning: a portion of your grade is based on the evaluation of the director at your service learning site. Each student will perform at least three hours per week of service at one of the sites in New York City already arranged by Fordham's Dorothy Day Center for Service Learning and I.

Oral Report on Service Learning experience: each student will give a short presentation (10-15 minutes max) on her or his service work – what the work was, what was learned, relevance to course themes, interests for future that might come out of this work.

Short argument analysis: This essay (2-3 pages) will be due in February; it will involve a choice of questions, each requiring summary of an argument from one of our readings, and requiring use of paraphrase, regular quotation, block quote, and proper citation.

Midterm paper: Your knowledge of the readings will be evaluated in a midterm paper in October. This paper will require critical response to our readings. Attending to class discussion will help a lot, since the options for the paper will emphasize the questions on which we focus during class.

Compare/Contrast Paper: There will also be a 6 page paper due in November, in which you will also have a choice of topics. Most questions will ask you to evaluate the theories we have learned by application to one of the social policy questions we have studied, and to bring in experience gained through your service learning work in defending your own view of the issue. (You are graded on how good an argument you make, not on whether you agree with any particular ethical outlook, including ones that you might encounter in your service learning). 1% for every two grammar errors.

Final exam: the final exam in May will have multiple choice questions and short answer questions on our course readings and themes. Attendance in class and doing the readings will be key for this.

Other Policies

Attendance is absolutely vital, since this course focuses on discussion and response to course themes. More than one unexcused absence will seriously affect your in-class participation grade.
-- Leaving for family trips is not an excused absence.
-- Employers must understand your college commitments; let me know in advance of conflicts.
-- Illness-related absences require a doctor’s note.
-- Long absence periods due to personal or family crises may require withdrawal from the course. Papers also need to be on time, since our semester schedule is tight here. As per standard policy, each day late is half a grade, unless (for extraordinary reasons) you arrange an extension beforehand.

Honesty and Citation: I take this very seriously; cheating is the one unforgivable sin. All your work for this class must be original, must be your own, and you must cite your sources, both when you quote text, and when you paraphrase. Cheating is unfair to other students (esp. in an ethics class!). Examples of cheating:

(1) Handing in work you did for another class without clearing it with me.
(2) Copying another student's work on a test or paper.
(3) Handing in an essay copied or downloaded in whole or part from the internet, including any uncited website, or copied from an encyclopedia, book, or article without citation is plagiarism. This holds true even if the wording has been significantly changed.

If I judge that a student has cheated in any of these ways, or in any comparably serious fashion, that student will fail the entire course and it will go on his/her permanent record. If there are any prior offenses on record, suspension is possible. A very minor infraction results in an F for the entire assignment, usually dropping your final grade by half a letter, at least. A zero for an assignment will usually drop your final grade by a whole letter or more.

In almost all cases, our primary texts will be enough for your essays in this course. If you do bring in ideas and quotes from secondary sources, you must cite them either by footnotes or parenthetical references referring to a Works Cited section at the end of the paper. Either method of citation is fine with me.
- This includes paraphrases: even if you reword what the author said, cite the page number.
- It also includes websites: give the full URL of the page you cite. Note that webpages should never be the only source you cite in college essays. Use or Stanford webpages on Philosophy or the Routledge Encyclopedia available on our library’s Databases system, not Wikipedia (which is not an authoritative source).
- Remember that your own interpretation of the primary texts is most important to me.

Tentative Schedule

9/3: Introduction
(1) Explanation of the syllabus and service learning component and sites.
(2) Theories and problems in ethics (see handout in course packet).
(3) Discussion of moral relativism (see handout in course packet).
(4) Ethical issues in formal education: racial achievement gaps, charter schools, leveling, teacher tenure, school funding -- inequality, poverty, waste etc. (see handouts in course packet).
(5) Historical example: Thaddeus Stevens: Champion of Freedom, Historical PA Leaflet 7 (packet)

9/7-9/10: Ethical Dimensions of Educational Issues: Two Case Studies
(1) NYT articles and other sources on the racial achievement gap (course packet).
(2) Social separation and leveling: Tamar Lewen, "Growing Up, Growing Apart" (course packet)
(3) Nel Noddings, Critical Lessons, ch.1 (course packet) on education styles: external incentive vs intrinsic motivation, wholistic vs skills, and the standardized test dilemma.

9/14-9/17: Education, Careers, Vocation, and Social Virtues
(1) Nel Noddings, Critical Lessons, ch.8, “Making a Living” (course packet)
(2) Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, ch.14: "The Nature of the Virtues" (course packet).
(3) Discussion: can jobs be "practices" (arts, sciences)? How do they fit into our ultimate purposes?

9/21-9/24: Aristotle on Eudaimonia and Virtue: a better way to understand moral education?
(1) Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Bk. I-II (pp.1-38)
(2) Discussion of the nature of "happiness," fulfillment, and a meaningful life.
9/28-10/1: Aristotle on Social Virtues
(1) Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bks. III-IV selections on courage, temperance etc. (pp.40-64).
(2) Evaluation: does Aristotle's account give us a sound objective basis for ethical judgment?
(3) Short Argument Summary (with proper use of quotations and citations) due 10/1.

10/5-10/8: Aristotle on Virtues and Friendship
(1) Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, BKs. VIII-IX selections on friendship (pp.119-128; 141-153).
(2) Discussion: Is friendship like a "practice" in MacIntyre's sense?

10/12-10/15: Rousseau and Kant: the moral critique of slavery in the Enlightenment
(2) Compare Lincoln's argument in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates (selection in course packet).
(3) Selections from Kant’s *Lectures on Ethics* (course packet)

10/19-10/22: Kant’s attempt to formulate a nonconsequentialist supreme principle of morality
(2) Different sorts of universalizability principles (handout in course packet)
(3) Discussion: how do we decide what maxims we ‘could rationally will’ to universalize?
(4) Begin Groundwork Part II.

10/26: Kant on the inviolable value of persons as individuals.
(1) Kant on persons as ends-in-themselves (Groundwork Part II continued)
(2) Midterm paper due 10/26 or 10/29 depending on topic.

10/29: Professor away at conference; film or make-up class will be scheduled.

Happy Halloween!

11/2-11/5: Altruism and the Utilitarian supreme principle of morality
(1) Brief explanation of Hobbesian egoistic ethics (class discussion).
(2) Peter Singer, "Morality, Egoism, and the Prisoner's Dilemma" (course packet)
(4) Typical objections to utilitarianism (handout in course packet).

11/9-11/11: Utilitarianism and Universal Education
(1) Mill, *Utilitarianism* ch.3.
(2) Mill, *On Liberty*, ch.3 on Individuality (course packet)
(3) Begin presentations on service learning work.

11/16: Applications: Deontological Perspectives on Criminal Justice
(1) Ted Honderich, “Backward-Looking Theories,” ch.2 of *Punishment*.
(2) Discussion: basic rights of due process and fair treatment of each individual.

11/19: Professor away at conference. Makeup class scheduled on 12/14.
11/23: Utilitarian Perspectives on Criminal Justice
(2) Continue service learning presentations.

11/30-12/3: Criminal Justice continued.
(1) Honderich continued.
(2) Jean Hampton, “The Moral Education Theory of Criminal Punishment” (course packet)
(3) Continue service learning presentations.

11/26: Happy Thanksgiving.

12/7-12/10: Introduction to ethics in the personalist tradition.
(1) Continue service learning presentations.
(2) Handouts on Buber, Levinas, Marcel and direct encounter with “alterity.”
(3) Raimond Gaita, Our Common Humanity, chs. 1-3 (course packet).
(4) Discussion: are our obligations particularistic or universalistic?

12/14: Makeup class
(1) Any remaining business (e.g. remaining presentations)
(2) Review for exam.

12/17: Final exam? (check date when schedule available)