Philosophical Ethics

(Service Learning-Integrated Section)

PHIL 1100

Course packet

Instructor: John Davenport
Spring 2010
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Philosophical Ethics (Phil 1100 – 001)

Service-Learning Integrated section

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**Everyday Ethics and Philosophical Ethics:** The term “ethics” has two distinct senses. It can refer to beliefs about right and wrong actions, and better and worse life-goals, that 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 reflect on 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 all make moral judgments and operate with an implicit set of values, along with some notion of what ought and ought not to be done, and a sense (however inarticulate) of what matters most in life. In particular, we make ethical assessments about three basic topics:

- 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. In that sense, the goal of ethics is to be able 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 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?  
- 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” who are inherently 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 agreed with this kind of 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 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 eudaimonism,
• deontological or rights-based approaches,
• utilitarianism, and
• social contract theory.

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. Because every student in this section will complete three hours of service learning work per week outside the classroom, some of our discussion will focus on social policy implications of ethical theory that are related to the service opportunities. Likewise, some of our readings concern ethical implications for political philosophy – e.g. possible grounds for human rights, duties to provide material assistance, how to conceive criminal justice, and the goods of education. 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 Thinking. 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 class. Don’t be stopped by self-doubt! Even if you are not certain your view is defensible, or merely want to ask questions,

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 five 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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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<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>Short argument analysis</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>Compare/contrast paper</td>
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<td>Service Learning oral report</td>
<td>10%</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 be 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 your director at your service learning site. Each student will perform three hours per week of service at one of the sites in New
York City already arranged by the instructor and the Office of Service Learning.

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 March. 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 April, in which you will also have more 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.

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.

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;
-- Illness-related absences require a doctor’s note (except for H1N1);
-- 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. 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 here. 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 a whole letter.

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

1/19-1/22: Introduction
(1) Theories and problems in ethics (see handout in course packet)
(2) Discussion of moral relativism (see handout in course packet)
(3) Socrates and the “Axial Age” in Greek history: the transformation from archaic values.
(4) Review of themes in Plato on meritocracy.
(6) Introduction of service learning opportunities.

1/26-1/29: Plato’s critique of tyranny
(1) Plato on timocracy, oligarchy, “democracy” and tyranny: Republic Book VIII.
(2) The role of education and the shape of society in promoting personal virtue.
(3) Plato’s Republic Book IX: 568b-580c.
(4) Hegel’s master-slave dialectic (a summary in class)

2/2-2/5: The Enlightenment Argument against Slavery and Monarchy
Discussion: Can a Person Sell Herself into Slavery Voluntarily and Legitimately? (course packet)
(1) Selections from Locke’s Second Treatise of Government (course packet)
(2) Selections from Rousseau’s On the Social Contract (course packet)
(3) Selections from Kant’s Lectures on Ethics (course packet)
(4) Begin Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Preface & Part I (time permitting)

2/9-2/12: Kant’s attempt to formulate a nonconsequentialist supreme principle of morality
(1) Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Parts I and II.
(2) Different sorts of universalizability principles (handout)
(3) Short Argument Summary (with proper use of quotations and citations) due Feb. 12. Discussion: how do we decide what maxims we ‘could rationally will’ to universalize?
2/16: Monday classes meet following President's Day. So our class does not meet at its normal time.
2/19: Professor away at conference in Chicago. Either a makeup class will be scheduled Tuesday the 16th, or a film will be scheduled Friday 1 – 2:15 pm and meet in the library for viewing.

2/23-2/26: Kantian Ethics, Globalization, and Just War
(1) Kant on persons as ends-in-themselves (Groundwork Part II continued)
(3) James Turner Johnson, “Searching for Common Ground: Ethical Traditions at the Interface with International Law,” in Universalism vs Relativism (course packet)

3/2-3/5: Altruism and the Utilitarian supreme principle of morality
(1) Midterm paper due 3/2 or 3/5 depending on topic.
(2) Peter Singer, "Morality, Egoism, and the Prisoner's Dilemma" (course packet)
(3) John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, chs. 1-3.

3/9-3/12: Utilitarianism and Universal Education
(1) Mill, Utilitarianism continued.
(2) Mill, On Liberty, ch.3 on Individuality (course packet)
(3) Thaddeus Stevens: Champion of Freedom, Historical PA Leaflet 7 (course packet)
(4) Nel Noddings, Critical Lessons, ch.8, “Making a Living.”
(5) Raimond Gaita, Our Common Humanity, ch.11, “Goodness and Truth” [time permitting]
Discussion: different moral conceptions of universal education.

3/15-3/19 Spring break. Enjoy!

3/23-3/26: Applications: Utilitarian and Deontological Perspectives on Criminal Justice
(1) Typical objections to utilitarianism (handout in course packet).

3/30: Criminal Justice continued. (Happy Passover)
(1) Jean Hampton, “The Moral Education Theory of Criminal Punishment” (course packet)

4/2: Good Friday; University Closed.

4/6-4/9: Aristotle on Eudaimonia and Virtue: a better way to understand moral education?
(1) Compare/Contrast paper due.
(2) Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Bk. I-II (pp.1-38)
(3) Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Bks. III-IV selections on virtues (pp.40-64)

4/13-4/16: Aristotle on Virtues and Friendship
(1) Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, BKs. VIII-IX selections on friendship (pp.119-128; 141-153).
(2) Begin presentations on service learning work.

(1) Aristotle continued.
(3) Continue service learning presentations.

**4/27-4/30: Historical and Agapic Duties: deciding between the theories?**
(1) Raimond Gaita, *Our Common Humanity*, chs. 1-3 & ch.13 on “Common Humanity”
   Discussion: are our obligations particularistic or universalistic?
(3) Continue service learning presentations.

**5/4: Introduction to ethics in the personalist tradition.**
(1) Gaita continued.
(2) Handouts on Buber, Levinas, Marcel and direct encounter with “alterity.”
(3) Continue service learning presentations.

**5/7: Reading Day: Class Review Session.**

5/11: Final Exam?