

Philosophy 205 – Introduction to Ethics (Section 04)

Instructor: Corey Katz

Email: ckatz@slu.edu

Website: BlackBoard site

Mailbox/Location: Adorjan Hall, Philosophy Office, 1st floor, Rm. 130

Class Location: Beracha Hall 216

Meeting Times: TR 11:00-12:15pm

Office hours: By appointment.

Note: I reserve the right to amend this syllabus as I see fit and give notice to you.

Course Description

This course will introduce you to some major themes and theories in Western thought about what makes for a good life and how we ought to treat others. However, human lives and values are complex and no one set of rules can tell us everything about how we should treat others. That's why we will explore moral theories in light of our discussion of a number of contemporary ethical and social issues. I aim to show how these theories are relevant by showing how they can help us rationally think through some of these pressing questions.

This course assumes you have moral sensibilities as good as anyone else has. But we need ethical philosophy because we are all less reasonable than we could be. We don't always know the reason why we do something or why we think doing that action is right. And if we do have a reason, it's not always a good one. Ethical philosophy can help us live more rationally, guided by thoughtful, reflective convictions. Thus, another aim of the course is to show you that rational moral debate is possible, something which we can practice and at which we can improve our skills.

Required Texts

Please purchase these editions as there are secondary readings in these editions we will also be using.

-- *Groundwork For Metaphysics Of Morals*

Author: Kant

Edition: '02

Publisher: Trilateral

ISBN: 9780300094879

-- *Utilitarianism*

Author: Mill

Edition: '11

Publisher: Broadview

ISBN: 9781551115016

-- *XanEDU Reader* at the Bookstore

Course Objectives

1. Achieve a basic understanding of some of the most important ethical theories.
2. Be able to apply ethical theories to social and political issues and problems.
3. Understand and evaluate arguments for and against various ethical theories.
4. Be able to adopt an ethical framework to guide one's own actions, submit one's principles and beliefs to criticism in a community of peers, and to explain and defend one's views clearly.
5. Achieve a greater awareness of the importance of moral virtues, civic responsibilities, and the moral implications of one's day-to-day choices.

Course Requirements

Class preparation and participation: Please do the readings according to the schedule below. Students are required to attend every class and participate in the class discussion. Please bring the readings to every class. Unlike many other subjects, discussion is *integral* to understanding philosophy. Philosophical texts can be difficult, but patient reading, followed by discussion, followed by re-reading is a highly fruitful method.

Professionalism and Attendance: While sometime it may not seem like it, university does prepare you for the world of work. It calls on you to motivate yourself and take responsibility for your own work and success. I will partly evaluate your participation grade with an eye toward qualities that are important in the work-place, e.g. arriving on time, taking the initiative to seek help when you need it, working to improve and showing respect for others. In short, I ask that you treat the class like a job. Extremely rude behavior can result in expulsion from the classroom and course.

As in a job, you get a set amount of “sick-days” to use at your discretion: three. I will take attendance each class after the first week. Students missing *four* classes will have their final grade reduced by 2%, *five* classes by 4% and so on. I will assume that all absences are for good reasons such as illness, so you do not need to provide excuses for such absences (unless it causes you to miss an assignment). *I urge you to use your sick-days for when you really need them.* Exceptions will be made only for extended illness or other extraordinary circumstances that are severe enough to make these limits unreasonable. Students arriving to class later than half an hour after the start of class will be considered absent.

Homework Questions and Quizzes: Usually I will assign you homework questions to guide your reading. Bring a copy of your answers to class. I will randomly give pop quizzes based on those questions to ensure you are doing the readings.

Student Presentations: Each student will be responsible for participating in a group presentation on an issue in applied ethics. The presentation grade will consist in evaluation by the professor (50%), evaluation from fellow group members (40%), and evaluation by the audience (10%). At the beginning of the semester, students will rank their preferences with respect to topics. Groups will be assigned a topic and presentation date accordingly. The group will be responsible for researching the topic and choosing readings for the class at least one week before the presentation date; the group will then organize a presentation of the readings and facilitate discussion during the assigned class period.

Reflection Pieces: These are informal short papers of 2-3 pages. Unless a topic is assigned, each reflection should address one or more of the readings covered in the relevant part of the course. You don't need to develop a rigorous argument for a thesis as you would in an essay. Instead, you should engage in critical reflection about the issues raised in the readings. For example, do you agree or disagree with what the author(s) said? Why? How might the ideas in the readings be applied to some issue? You have a lot of latitude. **Even so, I expect you to explain and give reasons for your positions, reflections and ideas.** I will grade these mainly by how *thoughtful* they are, so lazy thinking is the most important thing to avoid. I want your insights, so try to *show that you've reflected* on the readings and say something interesting. Grades will also reflect your understanding of the material and quality of writing.

Exams: There is a midterm and a final exam. If a student is unable to take the exam, he or she must contact me ***in advance***. If a student does not contact me in advance and does not write the exam, no make-up will be possible and you will receive a grade of 0.

Classroom Policies

Technology: Please silence your phones. No electronic devices may be used in class. This includes laptops, phones, mp3 players, etc. **Bring the books and/or printed readings to class.** In my experience, laptops do little other than diminish classroom discussion.

Turning in work: All reflection papers will be submitted online before the class that it is due, unless you have made other arrangements with me in advance. ***For each day a paper is late, I will deduct 3% of the grade up to four days, after which the paper will receive an F.***

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Work must be your own and any quote or idea you take from another must be cited. I will always take appropriate measures if a student is caught cheating or plagiarizing. See <http://www.slu.edu/x12657.xml> for SLU's policy.

Disabilities: Please see me if you have a disability that has been documented by the university's Office of Student Disability Services. I strongly believe in an open and accessible classroom and will work with you to ensure this. Students with disabilities needing documentation should visit the SLU Disability Services website at <http://www.slu.edu/x24491.xml>.

Etiquette: Ethical issues are sometimes heated topics. We must debate respectfully with each other if we are to move toward mutual understanding. Extremely rude behavior can result in expulsion from the classroom and course.

Student Evaluation

Grading Criteria:

1. Three reflection papers (5% + 10% + 15%): 30%
2. Group presentation: 20%
3. Midterm Exam: 15%
3. Final Exam: 20%
4. Quizzes, Homework: 5%
5. Participation, Professionalism: 10%

Grade Concerns: I encourage you to talk with me if you feel a grade was unfair, but you must do so within a week after I return graded work to the class.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

T Jan 12

Introduction and syllabus; What is ethics?

R Jan 14

Can we make arguments about the morality of actions? - Vaughn, "Moral Arguments," ["You are not entitled to your opinion"](#)

T Jan 19

What is the relation between morality and religion? - Plato, "Euthyphro," Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics"

R Jan 21

What is the relation between morality and civil law? - Plato, "Crito," King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

T Jan 26

Meta-ethics: Is morality relative or universal? - Kreeft, "A Refutation of Moral Relativism," Brooks, "If it Feels Right..."

R Jan 28

Meta-ethics: Is value objective or subjective? – Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values"

Reflection Paper 1 due (on a topic of your choice)

T Feb 2

Why engage in making moral theories? What is the aim of normative theory? - "Criteria for Judging Moral Theories," "Cheeseburger Ethics"

R Feb 4

Discussion/Debate: How ought we to treat animals?

T Feb 9

Moral Theory 1: *Utilitarianism* – excerpts from Bentham (pp.122-124), "Introduction" and Chapters 1 and 2

R Feb 11

Utilitarianism, Chapters 3 and 4

T Feb 16

Criticizing Utilitarianism: Are moral actions those that produce the most impartial good? Is everything that's good good because of the satisfaction it causes to someone? - Huxley and Nozick in reader

R Feb 18

Applying Utilitarianism: What is morally required of affluent people in the face of human poverty and suffering? - Singer, "Solution to World Poverty."

Reflection Paper 2 due (on utilitarianism)

T Feb 23

Student Presentation

R Feb 25

Student Presentation

T Mar 1 - **In-Class Mid-term exam**

R Mar 3

Prof. Katz away at conference

T Mar 8

Spring break

R Mar 10

Spring break

T Mar 15

Moral Theory 2: Kant – *Groundwork*, "Preface," Schneewind, "Why Study Kant?"

R Mar 17

Groundwork Chapter 1 and Baron "Acting from Duty"

T Mar 22

Groundwork Chapter 2 and Wood, "What is Kantian Ethics?," Demarco, "Kantian Deontology." (in reader)

R Mar 24

Easter break

T Mar 29

The Person as an End-In-Itself and Animal Rights, Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights"

R Mar 31 - Prof. Katz away at a conference

T Apr 5

Criticizing Kant – Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie for Philanthropic Purposes"

Reflection Paper 3 Due (on Kant)

R Apr 7

Debate preparation: Applying Kant: Sweatshop Labor – Arnold and Bowie, "Sweatshops and Respect for Persons," Maitland, "The Great Non-Debate Over Sweatshops"

T Apr 12

In-class Debate

R Apr 14

Student Presentation

T Apr 19

Student Presentation

R Apr 21

Student Presentation

T Apr 26

Student Presentation

R Apr 28

Final Exam Review