

FALL 2004

PHIL 304: ETHICS

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Clough 402
Official Office Hours: 11:00-11:50 WF; 2-3 TR & by appt.
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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

General Description:

The field of ethics is quite large, but it largely concerns with the goods (or goals) and norms (or guidelines) that guide human action and interaction. **Central questions** include: What is the human good, i.e., that good unique to humans which best represents their highest fulfillment? What are the marks of good character? What are the criteria for right and wrong action? What differentiates good consequences from bad? Can (or should) there be universally applicable norms? What role, if any, do emotions play in ethical deliberations?

In addressing these questions, we will focus our study on the central ethical norms of **four systems**: ethics of excellence (represented by Aristotle and Aquinas), deontology (represented by Kant and Feinberg), utilitarianism (as formulated by Bentham and Mill), and ethics of care (represented by Noddings). Our approach will be structured both historically and topically. Especially in ethics, a theory/practice split is deeply problematic. An ethical position that is judged theoretically sound but suspect (or unrealistic) in its application misses the point of ethics: to live well or rightly. We will thus integrate “theoretical” concerns (about issues of the nature and justification of ethical criteria) with “practical” concerns (about specific courses of action or responses to moral problems) – especially in Group Work.

Main Course Goals:

- To develop a sophisticated and insightful understanding of the criteria that guide and govern meaningful human action and interaction, with special attention to the arguments for (and against) these criteria. The course will explore different orientations by focusing on the *arguments* and *applications* of key ideas or norms of four general ethical systems: the Ethics of Excellence, Deontology, Utilitarianism, and the Ethics of Care.
- To become adept at applying the criteria of these systems to concrete (often) contemporary issues, recognizing the importance of checking “theory” with “practice” and vice versa
- To successfully work in groups as you discuss, apply, and evaluate both criteria and issues

II. COURSE OUTLINE:

A. Moral Metaphors

B. The Golden Rule

C. The Ethics of Excellence

1. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
2. Aquinas, selections from *Summa Theologica* (supplement)
3. Rosa Parks and excellence

D. Deontology:

1. Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*
2. Rights (Feinberg supplement)

E. Consequentialism:

1. Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*
2. Mill's *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty*

F. The Ethics of Care

1. Noddings' *Caring*

G. Group Presentations

III. REQUIRED BOOKS:

- Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, tr. Christopher Rowe
- Immanuel Kant: *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Lewis White Beck.
- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty* (also includes Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*)
- Rosa Parks & James Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story*
- Mappes & Zembaty, *Social Ethics*

There will also be some shorter readings distributed in class.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| Prep/Partic | = 10% |
| Group Work | = 42% |
| 1 Paper | = 16% |
| 2 Exams | = 32% |

A. Preparation & Discussion Participation (10%): *Qualitative* participation is vital to your learning and is expected throughout the semester. First, you should carefully prepare for class; this means actively reading (see "Reading Philosophy") and reflect on the day's assignment (both by noting key definitions and arguments and by formulating questions) *prior* to class. This will prepare you to listen with understanding and to actively participate in class discussion. **Discussion** participation involves (i) contributing your own views, questions, and reactions to the readings and class discussion, and (ii) carefully listening to, questioning, and responding to the views of others. Aim to participate regularly, but avoid dominating class discussion.

You are expected to **attend** all classes. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for all material covered and assignments distributed or collected. Since I consider attendance a factor of participation, I don't distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. (If you're not present, you can't contribute.) If you miss more than 3 classes, your preparation/participation grade will drop 1/3 letter grade per additional missed day. *Also*, you are expected to contact me so we can discuss your attendance.

When determining your discussion participation grade, I will look at the *quality* and *pattern* of your participation over the course of the semester. Its *quality* will be gauged in terms of its (i) **clarity**, (ii) **insight**, and (iii) **sophistication**. In assessing the *pattern* of your work, I will look at (i) **consistency**, (ii) **effort**, and (iii) **improvement** and **progress** (or regress) you have made in critically discussing materials throughout the semester.

To gauge your **preparation** and understanding of material, I will occasionally give *homework*, *quizzes*, or *in-class writing exercises* designed to (i) test your understanding of the reading, or (ii) help you crystallize your thinking on a relevant class issue. The chief criteria used in evaluating this work will be **clarity** and **accuracy**. I will comment on this work but typically not assign a numerical grade; instead I will assign + (excellent work), √ (good work), – (problematic work), or 0 (no work) to indicate the quality of your work. These exercises are an important part of your ongoing work. Use them to test your understanding and recognize them as a source of feedback from me. I'll consider the profile of your work in this area (did you do them all, did you improve, etc.) in determining this part of the grade.

Missed work in this category can be made up *only* when you have discussed the matter with me *prior* to the beginning of the class you miss. Each student is allowed **one** make-up, but make-up material must be completed by the beginning of the next class meeting.

If you are concerned about your performance in either of these areas, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

B. GROUP WORK (42%): Philosophical thinking requires your active engagement in learning and testing the ideas and methodologies involved. The following is designed to promote this.

Group Work: Given that ethics has the complexities of human interaction as one of its dominant dimensions, we will work in groups on 5 different occasions (see calendar for these) on issues concerning current ethical problems (readings will typically be taken from the *Social Ethics* volume). An entire class period will be devoted to each group work project; questions will be assigned for the group to work through

during that period. The primary goal of group work is for you to *actively* and *effectively* work with other students in exploring and assessing the details of ethical theories and issues.

Each of you will be assigned to a group of 4; group membership will remain the same throughout the semester. Group work will consist of the following 2 items:

(1) **Meeting write-ups (4 @ 4%)**: After each group meeting, a formal write-up of the group's final answers to assigned questions will be due. Each member of the group will be responsible for the final composition and submission of one of the 4 graded write-ups, but all members are to fully contribute to, review, and ultimately pledge each of them. All members of the group will receive the *same grade* for this work.

NOTE: Since an integral part of these assignments is participation in group discussion, this work cannot be effectively made up in any other fashion. There will thus be **no make-up** for this work. Students absent from a group meeting will receive no credit (a "0") for the work associated with that meeting (i.e., both items 1 & 2, resulting in a "0" for that 8% of the final grade). If, however, you miss a group meeting due to *extenuating* circumstances (ordinary illness is *not* a likely example of this), you can still contribute to the group work *if* you get your answers to your group in advance of the class meeting *and* further participate in preparing the group work for that assignment. (You will not, however, be able to make up item 2 below – group evaluation – since you will have at best a limited basis for such an evaluation.) You must notify me *as soon as possible* (in advance of the class meeting – unless this is genuinely impossible) to determine whether your case counts as an extenuating circumstance, and the answers you provide to your group must be substantial and complete.

(2) **Group evaluation (4 @ 4%)**: In addition to meeting write-ups, you will each assess your group's interaction for each meeting in light of the criteria of the four main ethical systems we will study. (So, for one assignment, you will use deontological criteria to assess how your group functioned, how it functioned in light of utilitarian criteria for another, and its performance or exercise of qualities of excellence for yet another. More detailed assignments will be given at the appropriate time.) Each person will do his/her own work for the group evaluation and receive his/her *own grade*. You may talk with one another about this exercise, but you must generate your own thoughtful response to the assignment.

I don't wish to undermine the integrity of group work by assigning individual grades here, but I do believe that privacy and consultation with your own conscience are both common features of our moral experience and also integral elements of group work.

(3) **Group final presentation (10%)**: As the culminating experience of group work, each group will present in class a "final position" on the ethical criteria it finds most plausible, and how those criteria should best be applied to an issue it thinks vitally important. Disagreements within the group may exist and can be addressed in the presentation. Each group will present its position to the class during the final days of the semester and then revise it in light of class discussion. All group members will receive the *same grade* for this presentation. More details will be provided at the appropriate time.

Though specific criteria will be provided for these assignments, the general criteria used are: (i) **insight** and **sophistication** in understanding the relevant issue and its implications, (ii) success in **relating** ethical criteria to issues, (iii) **clarity**, **focus** (success in synthesizing the group's work), and **organization**.

C. PAPER (16%): There will be 1 paper on a topic of your construction (I will offer parameters and suggestions). The due date is tentatively scheduled for **November 10**. More details will be provided at the appropriate time. My standard reduction on late papers is 1/3 letter grade (e.g., the difference between a B+ and a B) per calendar day late (beginning at the start of the class hour).

D. EXAMS (2 @ 16%): There will be 2 exams (a midterm and a final) consisting of a mix of objective, short-answer, and essay questions. The final will have a cumulative essay question.

V. MISCELLANEOUS:

• **Successful Classroom:** In working through examples, we will inevitably cover a number of controversial political, social, and religious issues. I hope you will take these issues seriously and have the courage to subject your own views to critical scrutiny. If you feel uncomfortable doing so, please come talk with me. I strongly encourage you to contribute your insights, criticisms, and bafflements, since we typically learn better when we are actively involved with the material. In our class everyone has a right to express a genuine opinion, curiosity or criticism, but no one has a right to put one down.

Respect towards all members of the class and to course content is the key. I work hard to generate a setting in which we can be honest and critical, but my efforts are minimal without your individual contributions. Impediments to a successful classroom include tardiness, cell phones, disruptive talking, lethargy, excessive absences, and leaving the classroom before the end of the hour. We are biological creatures, but since we also have a certain mastery over our bodies, please take care of your biological needs before class.

• **Grading Criteria:** See “Grading Criteria for Written Work” handout for specifics. My scheme is the following:

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|----|-----------|----|-------|------|
| | | B+ | 87-89 | |
| A | 94 and up | B | 84-86 | |
| A- | 90-93 | B- | 80-83 | etc. |

• **Computer Component:** You are responsible for any notes, assignments, etc. that I send out via e-mail. In addition, you will be expected to check documents left on the Academic Server. I will announce new documents that need to be read; if you are absent, you are responsible for reading these. If you're unfamiliar with computer use, please check with the computer staff. They'll be happy to help you.

• **Academic Volume Resources:** Our class has a folder on the Academic Server (it should be accessible at \\Fileserver1\acad_dept_pgm\Philosophy\Shade_Patrick\Public\PHIL 304). Included are: (1) readings that are handed out, (2) study questions (for some readings), (3) biographies of the philosophers studied, and (4) a list of additional books and websites for the course. Please consult this folder, and let me know if you have problems accessing it or finding materials.

• **Honor Code:** The Honor Code stipulates that all the work you submit is to be your own. You are encouraged to discuss topics and assignments with your classmates, but the work you hand in must be your own, i.e., formulated and written in your own words and style reflecting your own thoughtful treatment. Group work meeting write-ups and the group final presentation are exceptions to this stipulation in that they are products of your specific group's work and thoughtful treatment (and not simply your own).

• I'll be glad to help in any way I can, so don't hesitate to darken my doorway.

This syllabus is subject to revision (but don't worry; I'll discuss any changes with the class before I make them).

CALENDAR

Key:

S: Supplemental materials in my Academic Server folder and/or on reserve in the Library

| Monday | Wednesday | Friday |
|---|--|---|
| | 8/25 Moral Metaphors | 8/27 The Golden rule (S) |
| 8/30 Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> I (pp. 95-110) | 9/1 Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> II-III.5 (pp. 111-132) | 9/3 Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> III.6-12 (pp. 132-141); IV.6-9 (pp. 154-158); V.1-7 (pp. 158-169) |
| 9/6 Labor Day | 9/8 Group Work on 9/11 (View video Tuesday, 9/7) | 9/10 Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> VI.5 (pp. 179-181); VII.1-4, 8-10; (pp. 189-196, 201-203); VIII.1-6 (pp. 208-215) |
| 9/13 Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> VI.6-7 (pp. 181-182); X.1, 4-9 (pp. 241-2, 245-258) | 9/15 Aquinas on Charity (S) | 9/17 Aquinas on Law (S) |
| 9/20 Rosa Parks, <i>My Story</i> Chpts. 1-7 | 9/22 Rosa Parks, <i>My Story</i> Chpts. 8-12 Group Work 1 | 9/24 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. vii-xxiv, 3-22 |
| 9/27 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. vii-xxiv, 3-22 | 9/29 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 22-41 | 10/1 Kant's <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , pp. 41-63 (Recommended: pp. 63-73) |
| 10/4 Kant wrap-up | 10/6 Feinberg on Duties and Rights (S) | 10/8 Deontology examples Group Work 2 |
| 10/11 To be Determined (possibility: Rawls' theory of justice) | 10/13 Review | 10/15 MIDTERM EXAM |
| 10/18 FALL BREAK | 10/20 Bentham's <i>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> Chpts 1-3 (pp. 17-40) | 10/22 Bentham's <i>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> Chpts 4-5 (pp. 41-51) |
| 10/25 Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> Chpts 1-2 (pp. 181-202) | 10/27 Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> Chpts 3-4 (p. 203-15) | 10/29 Mill's <i>On Liberty</i> Chapter 3 (pp. 131-146) & 4 (partial, pp. 147-151) |
| 11/1 Mill's <i>Utilitarianism</i> Chapter 5 (pp. 41-63) | 11/3 Consequentialism examples Group Work 3 | 11/5 Mill wrap-up |
| 11/8 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 1 | 11/10 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 2 ***Paper Due*** | 11/12 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 3 |
| 11/15 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 4 | 11/17 Noddings' <i>Caring</i> Chpt 5 | 11/19 Care examples Group Work 4 |
| 11/22 To be Determined (possibility: viewing <i>Schindler's List</i> through the lens of our theories) | 11/24 Thanksgiving Break | 11/26 Thanksgiving Break |
| 11/29 Presentation planning | 12/1 Presentation Day 1 | 12/3 Presentation Day 2 |
| 12/6 Presentation Day 3 | 12/8 Final Arguments and Review | |

