

PHL 202 Introduction to Ethics Spring 2004

Course Goals: This course is designed to enhance your understanding of the moral dimensions of human experience and to provide you with the theoretical understanding and practical skills that you will need to give carefully reasoned answers to moral questions and to questions about the nature of morality. We shall analyze and evaluate influential competing accounts of moral obligation, goodness, and the nature of morality and moral thinking. We shall consider several case studies in engineering and medical ethics. Primary attention shall be given to learning how to identify, analyze, evaluate, and construct arguments.

Course Requirements: 3 exams; daily homework. Each exam will be 30% multiple-choice and 70% essay.

Grading:

Exams: Each exam will determine 1/3 of your exam average. Exam and final grades will be assigned according to this curve:

90% and above = A
88-89% = B+
82-87% = B
80-81% = B-
78-79% = C+
72-77% = C
70-71% = C-
68-69% = D+
62-67% = D
60-61% = D-
< 60% = F.

Make-up exams will be given only with a valid excuse and only if arrangements are made promptly, preferably in advance of the original examination date.

Homework: Most class periods have homework assignments. These assignments are due at the beginning of the class period for which they are assigned (i.e. they are to be completed *before* we discuss the topics they cover).

Each homework assignment has two parts. The first part (indicated in the assignment by '(1)') is (normally) to give a complete but concise one-paragraph summary (no longer than 1/2 page of standard paper), in your own words, of a specific passage from the reading assignment. The point of this part of the assignment is to explain clearly the position the author is arguing for and his reasons for thinking that it is true. The second part (indicated in the assignment by '(2)') is (normally) to evaluate that argument, usually by constructing an argument for an alternative position and explaining which is stronger (no more than 1/2

page). The point of this part of the assignment is to begin to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the author's position.

Homework assignments should be no longer than one side of one page of standard paper. Strike a balance between brevity and length: single sentence summaries and responses tend to be incomplete, whereas lengthy summaries and responses tend to contain needless detail. In your responses to the positions under discussion (i.e. in part (2) of your homework) do not simply report your agreement or disagreement with the position you have explained: think of a plausible argument against the author's argument and decide which is stronger. Since a substantial part of each examination will be writing an essay in which you explain and evaluate the positions of the philosophers we are reading in light of alternatives, homework assignments provide you with an opportunity to test your understanding and sharpen your critical skills before taking an exam on the material.

Homework will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis: a reasonable effort will receive full credit. Unsatisfactory homework may be redone. Up to 2 points will be added to (or subtracted from) your *exam average* as a function of how many homework assignments you have completed, specifically:

- 0-3 assignments completed = -2.
- 4-7 assignments completed = -1.
- 8 assignments completed = 0.
- 9-12 assignments completed = +1
- 13+ assignments completed = +2.

Since there are 20 homework assignments, it is not necessary to do all of them in order to receive 2 extra points. Bear in mind that these points are added to (or subtracted from) the *average* of all of your exams, so these points are quite valuable, especially if you are near the borderline between grades.

Homework is due at the beginning of the class period for which it is assigned: set it on the table at the front of the class when you arrive. **Late homework will not receive credit for any reason.**

Cell Phones, Pagers, and Other Beeping Things: Cell phones, pagers, and other beeping things are helpful devices but they are disruptive when they go off in class. Please turn all beeping devices off before the beginning of class. As an incentive to do so, I shall add *one point* to everyone's examination average if we get through the term with not more than *one* beep.

Attendance: Regular, prompt class attendance and participation are expected.

Dishonesty: The *UAH Student Handbook* defines plagiarism as "the use of any other person's work (such work need not be copyrighted) and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work in one's own work offered in fulfillment of academic requirements." (p. 84) Plagiarism is a serious offense. Any form of academic dishonesty will be punished severely.

Extra Credit: The Philosophy Department is sponsoring two public lectures this semester. “Race & Philosophy” will be given by Professor Charles Mills of the University of Illinois-Chicago on March 5th at 7:30 pm in Roberts Recital Hall. “What Do We Need to Know About Human Nature” will be given by Professor Louise Antony of the Ohio State University on April 7th at 7:30 pm in Wilson Hall Room 141. Students will be awarded 1 point on their *examination average* for each lecture they attend. **There will be no other extra credit assignments.**

Texts:

Class handouts.

Pojman, Louis (ed.) *Moral Philosophy: A Reader*, 3rd edition. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003).

Keys to Success:

1. **Attend class.** Every class meeting is important. Lectures will include explanations of difficult text material, new material will be introduced, problems will be discussed in detail, and important questions will be addressed thoroughly. There is a strong connection between class attendance and success in the course.
2. **Do the homework.** Philosophical skills cannot be mastered without regular exercise. Most of the exam questions are based on homework exercises. Many of the homework exercises are difficult. Even if you are unable to understand them at first, simply attempting them will put you in a much better position to understand class explanations and will enable you to ask helpful questions. Most importantly, doing the homework will give you practice in thinking philosophically and my comments will give you feedback on your work.
3. **Read the texts, reread the texts, and think about them.** The objects of philosophical investigation are not isolated claims, but arguments: reasons offered in support of claims. Read, and reread, the texts until you understand the key arguments they contain. First, *identify* the key arguments and separate them from background material. Next, *analyze* the arguments: identify the key claims being supported—the *conclusions*—and the reasons offered in support of those claims—the *premises*. At this stage, figure out what additional, unstated assumptions the author is making. Finally, *evaluate* the arguments. To do so, ask these key questions about each argument: (1) *would the premises, if true, provide significant evidence for the truth of the conclusion?* and (2) *is it reasonable to believe that the premises are true?* Your goal should be to try to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of all of the arguments we consider. position is not enough, however. What's most important is that you think for yourself about the issues raised in the text. To do this effectively, you must learn to identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments, and to confront philosophical problems and arguments with original ideas. All of this takes practice.

4. **Ask questions.** I teach best by responding to questions and you will probably learn best by identifying difficulties and asking questions about them. If you are having problems of any kind that can affect your performance in the course, please see me as soon as possible.

Course Schedule: What follows is a day-to-day schedule for the course. Discussion topics are subject to change, but exam dates are firm. Daily assignments are given in parentheses and are to be completed *prior* to the class period for which they are assigned. You are responsible for all assigned reading, whether or not it is discussed in class. Classes for which there is a written assignment are indicated with ‘*’.

January

- 12 *Syllabus.*
- 14 *Philosophy. Arguments. Basic Ethical Concepts.*
- 16 *Religion and Morality.* (Read Exodus 20-21 (class handout).)
- 19 **Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday.**
- 21* *The Challenge of Relativism and Natural Law.* (Homework to be completed *before* this class: Read Pojman (P): 20-32. (1) Explain Aquinas' argument for the existence of a natural law (pp. 24-25). (2) Are the premises of Aquinas' argument reasonable? Why or why not?)
- 23 *Natural Law Theory and Divine Command Theory.* (Reread P: 20-32.)
- 26* *An Argument for Relativism.* Read P: 33-37. (1) Explain Benedict's argument for moral relativism. (2) Are the premises of this argument reasonable? Does the conclusion follow from them?)
- 28* *Morality and Self-Interest: Plato.* (Read P: 53-61. (1) What reasons does Plato give for thinking that being morally good ('just') is beneficial? (2) Are these reasons good? Why or why not?)
- 30 *More on Plato.* (Reread P: 53-61.)

February

- 2* *Hobbes and Psychological Egoism.* (Read P: 62-71. (1) What reasons does Hobbes give for thinking that being morally good (abiding by the social contract) is beneficial? (2) Are these reasons good? Why or why not?)
- 4* *Rand and Ethical Egoism.* (Read P: 72-78. (1) What are the crucial premises in Rand's argument for the claim that our only moral obligation is to advance our own happiness? (2) Are these premises true? Does Rand's conclusion follow from them? Briefly explain your answer.)
- 6* *An Argument Against Ethical Egoism.* (Read P: 79-86. (1) Explain Rachels' argument for the claim that ethical egoism is unacceptably arbitrary. (2) Are the premises of this argument reasonable? Would they, if true, support his conclusion? Explain your answer.)
- 9 *How to Write a Philosophical Essay.* First Exam Essay Topics Handed Out.
- 11 **First Examination.**
- 13 *Goodness.*
- 16* *Plato Again: The Transformative Power of Goodness.* (Read P: 107-112. (1) Explain what

- Plato's story about the prisoners in the cave is supposed to illustrate about the nature of goodness and our beliefs about it. (2) Give a plausible argument against Plato's view and decide whether it shows Plato is wrong.)
- 18* *Goodness is Pleasure.* (Read P: 113-115. (1) Explain Bentham's argument for the claim that pleasure is the only intrinsic good. (2) Are the premises of this argument true? Does the conclusion follow from those premises? Briefly explain your answer.)
- 20 *More on Hedonism.* (Reread P: 113-115.)
- 23* *Goodness is Created.* (Read P: 116-123. (1) Explain Nietzsche's reasons for thinking that goodness is a human creation. (2) Is Nietzsche's argument good? Briefly explain your answer.)
- 25* *A Thought Experiment about Goodness: Nozick's Experience Machine.* (Read P: 124-125. (1) Explain Nozick's "experience machine" argument. (2) Are the premises of this argument true? Does the conclusion follow from those premises? Can Nozick's thought experiment be brought to bear against Nietzsche's view? Briefly explain your answer.)
- 27* *Mill's Utilitarianism.* (Read P: 141-146. (1) Explain Mill's proof of the principle of utility. (2) Briefly evaluate Mill's argument.)

March

- 1 *More on Mill.* (Reread P: 141-146.)
- 3* *Rule Utilitarianism.* (Read P: 157-167. (1) Explain Hospers' procedure for deciding which moral rules are correct. (2) Is this procedure correct? Why or why not?.)
- 5 *More on Rule Utilitarianism.* (Reread P: 157-167.)
- 8* *Criticisms of Utilitarianism: Williams.* (Read P: 168-178. (1) Explain Williams' objection to utilitarianism. (2) Is this objection successful? Briefly justify your answer.)
- 10* *Engineering Ethics: Codes of Conduct.* (Read the class handout on engineering codes of conduct. (1) Explain, in your own words, the 'paramount' principle of engineering ethics. (2) Is this moral principle correct and fundamental? Explain your answer.)
- 12 *Engineering Ethics Case Study: Radioactive Waste and Future Generations.* Second Exam Essay Topics Handed Out. (Read the class handout on the problem of radioactive waste disposal.)
- 15 **Second Examination.**
- 17 *Alternatives to Utilitarianism: Deontology and Virtue Theory.*
- 19* *Kant's Categorical Imperative.* (Read P: 194-213. (1) Explain the version of the categorical imperative Kant states on pp. 209-210. (2) Is this principle correct? Why or why not?)
- 22 **Spring Break.**
- 24 **Spring Break.**
- 26 **Spring Break.**
- 29* *Kant's Categorical Imperative.* (Reread P: 194-213. (1) Explain the version of the categorical imperative Kant states on p. 200. (2) Is this principle correct? Why or why not?)
- 31* *More on Kant.* (Read P: 214-228. (1) Explain Feldman's objection to Kant's categorical imperative. (2) Is this objection correct? Briefly support your answer.)

April

- 2 *Conclude Discussion of Kant.*

- 5 *Applied Ethics: Medical Ethics and Codes of Conduct.* (Read class handout on the nursing code of conduct. No written homework.)
- 7 *Medical Ethics Case Study: Distributing Scarce Resources.*
- 9* *Aristotle's Virtue Theory.* (Read P: 249-259. (1) Explain the argument given by Aristotle under heading '(4)' on p. 252. (2) Is this argument sound? Why or why not?)
- 12 *More on Aristotle.* (Reread P: 249-259.)
- 14* *Contemporary Virtue Theory.* (Read P: 271-286. (1) Explain MacIntyre's reasons for thinking that achieving internal goods requires the virtues. (2) Is he right? Briefly justify your answer.)
- 16 *More on MacIntyre.* (Reread P: 271-286.)
- 19* *Religion and Morality: The Euthyphro Problem.* (Read P: 311-312. (1) Explain Socrates' argument for the claim that the pious (roughly: that which is morally right) cannot be what the gods love. (2) Briefly evaluate this argument. What does this argument show about the connection between religion and morality?)
- 21 *More on Religion and Morality.* (Read P: 313-317.)
- 23 *Summary and Review.* Final exam essay topics handed out.

**The final examination will be given on Monday, May 3rd
from 11:30 am-2:00 pm.**