PHIL 2: ETHICS
Spring 2008
Section 04
MW 3:00-4:15        MND-3009
General Education Area C3
WebCT-Assisted

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PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT    MND-3030    278-6424

OFFICE HOURS:   MW 1:00-2:00;  BA

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION
Examination of the concepts of morality, obligation, human rights, and the good life. Competing theories about the foundations of morality will be investigated.

Satisfies General Education Area C3

OBJECTIVES:
- Determining the place of morality in human life, including the issue of the reality of moral properties and the truth status of moral claims;
- Fundamental moral concepts, including “good,” “right,” “worth,” “obligation,” “principle,” “virtue,” and “character”;
- Appreciation of the diversity of the moral realm, as represented by different cultures and social groups;
- Introduction to prevailing ethical theories: Consequentialist, Deontological, and Virtue Ethics;
- Presentation of the implications and commitments of prevailing theories with an eye to showing that a virtue ethics can be philosophically favored;
- Introduction to moral and ethical reasoning and application of moral reasoning to actual moral issues;
- Guidance in presenting moral reasoning in argumentative written form.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:
Students will be expected to:
- Read and understand introductory treatments of ethical theories, often in the form of primary sources;
- Follow the implications of theories, and point out implications not explicitly demonstrated;
- Demonstrate an appreciation for the diversity of the moral realm by showing what follows from points of view not their own;
- Defend in an effective way their own conclusions regarding ethical theories;
- Apply what they have learned to moral issues.


**REQUIREMENTS:** Three exams at scheduled time. (15% each)
Three 3-5 page papers (15% each)
In-class quizzes and participation (10%)

**POLICIES:**

**WebCT**
The class will use some elements of WebCT.
WebCT is a program designed for online college courses. Among other functions, it serves as a location for course material, lecture notes, papers, and discussions.
I will make important course content available, including lecture notes and other supplementary material.
You will take the reading quizzes and exams on WebCT and submit papers through it.
The WebCT site is available at [https://online.csus.edu](https://online.csus.edu)

**Exams**
We will review the material for each exam briefly during the class preceding, explaining what concepts and abilities the exam will test for. I welcome questions, even at times outside that review period.
I will open the exam ‘window’ for each exam for two days. You may take the exam at any time during the open-window period. You will have 75 minutes for the first two exams, two hours for the third.

**Warning:** WebCT sometimes shuts down for maintenance late at night, so check the announcements at the main WebCT page to make sure you have enough time to finish.

To take an exam in WebCT:
- Enter WebCT at [https://online.csus.edu](https://online.csus.edu);
- Open the main page for PHIL 2;
- Open “Assessments” (under “Course Tools” on the left margin of the main page);
- Answer the questions within the space provided (make sure you submit each question and the entire exam).

You will have only one chance to take the exam, so check your answers before submitting.
There will be no makeup exams.

**Reading Quizzes**
There will be a reading quiz on almost every reading assignment. A reading quiz will consist of five to ten questions designed so that a careful reader should be able to answer them. The quiz will be due by the opening of the class period in which the reading will be discussed.
To take a reading quiz, follow the instructions for taking an exam above.

**Papers**
Follow the instructions for argumentative papers found in the “Guidelines for Writing Philosophy Papers” at the Philosophy Department website. Go to the Department’s main page (http://www.csus.edu/phil), click on “Dept. Program and Requirements,” then click on “Guidelines…” Or go directly to: http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/writing.htm Papers will be graded according to the “Grading Guidelines for Philosophy Papers”: http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/grading.htm

To submit a paper in WebCT:
- Enter WebCT at https://online.csus.edu;
- Open the main page for PHIL 2;
- Open “Assignments” (under “Course Tools” on the left margin of the main page);
- Open the correct assignment; you will see there the text of the assignment itself, as well as the due date and time;
- You will see a space for the paper – don’t use it;
- Instead, click on the “Attachment” button;
- Attach your paper as an editable file, something that will open in Microsoft Word (not a .pdf or .htm file); if you’re unsure, attach it as a ‘text’ or ‘rich text’ file (txt. or .rtf); those options are available in all word processing programs.
- Late papers will be lowered a grade increment for every day past the due date. I will leave the window open for submitting papers for five days past the due date.

**Plagiarism**
Save a copy of earlier drafts and notes for your papers. If I suspect plagiarism, the burden of proof will be on you. You will have to show me that you didn’t plagiarize. You can do that by showing me the work you did preparing the paper: notes, early drafts, etc. Keep what you need to show me that the work is really yours.

**Class Meetings and Attendance**
I expect attendance at every class meeting. If for some excellent reason you cannot make class, let me know – preferably in advance. If this is impossible let me know by 5:00 on the day you miss. Call my desk (278-7288) or the Department office (278-6424). I will lower you a grade increment for every unexcused absence.

Class meetings will begin at 3:00 with a calling of the roll. Be on time. Anticipate. Excuses don’t cut it: I will treat a pattern of late arrival as an unexcused absence.

I expect silent attention during class periods. If there is a class discussion I will serve as moderator; please wait to be recognized before making a contribution.

If you wish to ask a question, answer a question, or make a contribution to the class, please ask to be recognized. There is no excuse for conducting a private discussion during class time. I will treat a pattern of talking in class as an unexcused absence.

**Reading Assignments**
You will be responsible for the entirety of all readings assigned. However, at times I may indicate in the syllabus below that I will pay particular attention to some part of a reading (For instance, I divide Pojman’s argument against moral relativism over two class periods on February 6 and 11). As a result, it may happen that other parts of the reading will not be treated in class. You will be responsible for them anyway. If you don’t understand something, ask a question. Remember, students’ questions help me too.

**Grades**
Conversion Between Letter and Numerical Grades

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- Exams will receive a numerical score;
- Papers will be assigned a letter grade by the criteria in the “Grading Guidelines”;
- Reading quizzes will receive a grade of 2 (full credit), 1 (inadequate reading), or 0 (not taken); an average of 1.7 will constitute full credit for the reading quiz component of the final grade (10%). So it’s very much in your interest to take them conscientiously.

The course grade will be determined thus:
- Exams will receive their numerical score;
- The letter grade for papers will be converted to the highest number within the grade range (so a B+ paper, say, will be assigned 91);
- A reading quiz score of 1.7 or above will receive a score of 100. Lower scores will be prorated.

The course grade will be determined by the weighted sum of the exams, quizzes, and papers.

**SYLLABUS**


- Two souls abide, alas, within my breast,
  And each one seeks for riddance from the other,
  The one clings with a dogged love and lust
  With clutching part unto this present world,
  The other surges fiercely from the dust…

  - Goethe, *Faust*
Week 1 1/28  Introduction

**Part I: The “Point” of Morality**

1/30 What is morality about (if anything)?
   Fundamental Moral Concepts
   What is right?  What is worthy?  Why be Good?

**Part II: The Status of Moral Beliefs**

Week 2 2/4  Moral Relativism: Different Kinds
   (Herodotus, “Custom is King” [156];  Ruth Benedict, “The Case for Moral Relativism” [167-165])

2/6  The Case Against Moral Relativism
   (Pojman, “The Case Against Moral Relativism” [166-191])

Week 3 2/11 Does Morality Depend on Religion?
   (Plato, “Does Morality Depend on Religion?” [372-375])

**Part III: Ethical Theories**

A. **Utilitarian Morality**

“The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.”
   - Vulcan Maxim, *Star Trek*

2/13 Maximizing Good
   (“Seaman Holmes and the Longboat of the William Brown” [237-238];  Bentham, “Of the Principle of Utility” [239-244])

2/11 Consequences for Whom?
   (Bentham, “Of the Principle of Utility” [231-236])

Week 4 2/18 Developments of the Theory
   (Mill, “Utilitarianism Refined” [245-249])

2/20 Recent Versions of Utilitarianism
   (Nielsen, “A Defense of Utilitarianism” [250-265])

Week 5 2/25 Criticisms of Utilitarianism
   (Williams, “Against Utilitarianism” [252-264])

2/27 Literary Interlude

**The window for Exam #1 will open on Thursday, February 28 at 12:00 noon and remain open until Saturday, March 1 at 12:00 midnight. The exam must be taken during that time.**
B. Deontological Ethics

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love,
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring and reprove;
Thou, who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free;
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!...
- William Wordsworth, Ode to Duty

O Duty,
Why hast thou never the visage of a sweetie,
Or a cutie?
- Ogden Nash, Kind of an Ode to Duty

The Golden Rule
Week 6 3/3 The Golden Rule and Its Flaws

Kantian Absolute Duties
3/5 Practical Reason and the Will
(Kant, “The Moral Law” [309-314])

Week 7 3/10 The Three “Propositions of Morality”
(Kant, “The Moral Law” [314-318])

3/12 Universalizable Maxims: The “Categorical Imperative”
(Kant, “The Moral Law” [318-323])

Week 7 3/17 The “Kingdom of Ends”
(Kant, “The Moral Law” [323-328]; Frankena, “Kant’s Theory” 329-442)

Paper 1 due Monday, March 17 (in WebCT)

Intuitionism, or Ethical ‘Pluralism’
3/19 Pluralism in Ethics
(Ross, “Intuitionism” [333-339])

Week 8 3/24 Intuitionism and Utilitarianism Compared
(Ross, “Intuitionism” [339-347])

3/26 Critiques of Deontological Ethics
Four Types of “Moral Luck”
(Nagel, “Moral Luck” [376-383])
Week 9  3/31  **Spring Recess**

4/2  **Spring Recess**

Week 10  4/7  Attributing Responsibility: A Puzzle  
(Nagel, “Moral Luck” [383-389])

C. **The Morality of Virtue**

Man’s character is his fate.

-- Heraclitus

4/9  What Do We Value?  
(Nozick, “The Experience Machine” [644-646])

The window for Exam #2 will open on Thursday, April 10 at 12:00 noon and remain open until Saturday, April 12, at 12:00 midnight. The exam must be taken during that time.

Week 11  4/14  “Happiness” Reconsidered  
(Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics” [409-415])

4/16  The Nature of the Virtues  
(Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics” [415-425])

**Paper 2 due Monday, April 19 (in WebCT).**

Week 12  4/21  Being “Virtuous” as Opposed to Merely “Continent”  
(Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics” [415-425])

4/23  **Philosophy Department Spring Symposium**  
(Class will attend afternoon Symposium session, Hinde Auditorium)

Week 13  4/28  Virtues and Character  
(Mayo, “Virtue and the Moral Life” [425-431])

4/30  Saints and Heroes: Those Who ‘Get’ It  
(Urmson, “Saints and Heroes” [431-445])

Week 14  5/5  Critique of Virtue Morality  
(Frankena, “A Critique of Virtue-Based Ethical Systems” [447-457])

**Part IV: The Metaphysics of the Moral Realm**

5/7  An Alternative Account of the Origins of “Good” and “Right”  
(Taylor, “On the Origin of Good and Evil” [141-153])

Week 15  5/12  Wickedness and the Complexity of “Moral Psychology”
5/14 Looking Ahead

Paper 3 due Friday, May 16 (in WebCT).

The Final Exam will open on Mon, May 19 at 12:00 noon and close on Wednesday, May 21, at 12:00 midnight. The final exam must be taken during that time.
**Paper 1: Due March 17**
a) Williams claims (correctly) that a Utilitarian would conclude that it is right that George take the job. What utilitarian considerations produce this conclusion?
b) A deontological theorist (like Kant) could conclude that it is for George to take the job. What considerations produce this conclusion?
c) What do you think is the right thing for George to do? What is your moral reasoning?

**Paper 2: Due Monday, April 19**
Kant gives four examples of maxims that (i) we could *conceive* as universal laws, but (ii) we could not possibly *will* to be universal laws. (Pojman, 323-325).
a) What is it about them that makes it possible for us to conceive them to be universal laws?
b) Why can they not be willed as universal laws?
c) Give a fifth such maxim: one that we can conceive as a universal law, but cannot will as one.
d) Indicate why we could conceive it but not will it.

**Paper 3: Due Friday, May 16**
A Variation on Williams’ ‘Pedro Problem’
(Pojman, 267-268)

The brakes on the trolley have failed.
The track divides into two tracks; you control the switch.
You can pull the switch to send the runaway trolley down one track where it will kill ten strangers.
Or you can send the trolley down the other track where it will kill the person who matters most to you in the world. (Assume that this person is neither Hitler nor Mother Teresa – neither pre-eminently good or evil. But you love him/her.)

You save the person you love.
You say:
   “I saved you because, although you are only one person and thus of lower utility than ten, it is nonetheless a universalizable maxim that in matters like this that it is morally permissible to act to save one person with whom you have an intimate tie.”

He/She responds (rather heatedly, we may imagine):
   “I thought you did it because you *love* me!”

Is it morally OK to save the person you love in these circumstances?
Justify your answer.
Comment on his/her response. Have you had “one thought too many”?