Course Description

Short Description: This course will investigate some of the central questions of philosophy and ethics: What is a moral dilemma? What is the relation between ethics and other fields such as law and religion? Is morality universal or intrinsically tied to social and/or individual contexts? What is the relation between virtue, happiness and pleasure? What is the criterion for moral judgment? What is the difference between following a rule and being a moral person?

Full Description: This course is divided into three parts. We will first familiarize ourselves with the importance of ethics in everyday life by discussing a number of moral dilemmas. We will then clarify our field by analyzing moral relativism, the relation between ethics and religion, and the relation between ethics and legality. In the second and largest part of the course we will compare two different theories on the universal criterion for moral judgment: Kant’s theory and utilitarianism. Both of these theories will be applied to contemporary issues. Finally, the criticism of such a universalistic approach by feminist ethics will allow us to analyze the so-called “virtue ethics”, a recent renewal of ancient ethics. We will occasionally return to the original dilemmas as we move through these ethical frameworks. The aim of the course is to lead students toward an autonomous judgment of fundamental issues related to the human society and ethical decision making, with special reference to happiness, justice, fairness, adherence to norms and civil disobedience, rules and duties, cultural and social influences. This will provide students with the basic critical skills for recognizing different ethical approaches and for judging their feasibility and correctness. By analyzing the philosophies that most consistently influenced the development of Western culture, students will be aided in their understanding of moral dilemmas, as well as their construction of philosophically informed decisions.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this class, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the major philosophical questions in the area of ethics with attention to the historical and conceptual development of these questions, and be able to articulate some of the major problems and responses central to this area of philosophy.

By the end of this class, students should also be able to demonstrate:
(a) understanding of the relationships among cultural, economic, political, and social forces, and their impact on human behavior;
(b) understanding of the processes and components of societies, states and cultures;
(c) understanding of the differences of class, gender and race in societies, states and cultures;
(d) awareness that human values and behavior, ideas of justice, and methods of interpretation are influenced by culture and time;
(e) ability to differentiate among historical and contemporary perspectives about the world with a view to fashioning a humane and just world.

Students will learn to:
(a) recognize the way in which the basic principles governing how one ought to live are conditioned by one's involvement in (and responsibilities toward) the socially organized community in which one lives;
(b) understand different positions on this issue, look for and appreciate the reasons given in support of the different views, and to assess the forcefulness of the challenge that each poses for the others and for our own culture.

This course enables the student to:
(a) appreciate the profound issues involved in social relations, such as dignity and diversity;
(b) engage in dialogue with great philosophers, paying close attention to their meaning, their reasons, their concerns, their vision;
(c) examine the way different philosophically defended views challenge each other, and how they also challenge unexamined presuppositions in our own culture;
(d) insert their own reflections into the dialogue;
(e) recognize the premises for a given conclusion or viewpoint, identify unexamined presuppositions, appreciate astute insights, expose vulnerabilities in established positions;
(f) recognize the need for ethical judgment;
(g) distinguish alternative courses of action;
(h) articulate the relevant ethical values, principles, rights, and virtues from the point of view of each stakeholder;
(i) formulate and support an ethical judgment;
(j) compare and contrast ethical theories and evaluate them in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

**Required Readings:**
- Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason* (also available online).
- Mill, *Utilitarianism* (also available online).
- Sartre, O’Neill, Jonas, Benhabib, Dostoevskij, Singer, Walzer, Elshtain (to be posted on Sakai).
- M.L. King (available online).

**Attendance Policy**
Students should plan to regularly attend the class, since we will often broaden the topics contained in the texts to contemporary issues, and since this class is mainly intended to the rousing of students’ personal thoughts and ideas. No more than three unexcused absences will be permitted. Unexcused absences beyond these will result in a lowering of your final grade.
Evaluation

- Participation & Presentation  20%
- Midterm Exam  40%
- Final Exam  40%

Grading

94-100: A  
90-93: A-  
87-89: B+  
84-86: B  
80-83: B-  
77-79: C+  
74-76: C  
70-73: C-  
67-69: D+  
60-66: D  
59 or lower: F

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism on the part of a student in academic work or dishonest examination behavior will result minimally in the instructor assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. In addition, all instances of academic dishonesty must be reported to the chairperson of the department involved. The chairperson may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending upon the seriousness of the misconduct.

Disabilities

Students with documented disabilities who wish to discuss academic accommodations should contact me the first week of class, as well as the Senior Academic Services Advisor.

Proposed Schedule

Tue. 09/04: Introduction to the course

Thu. 09/06: Some moral dilemmas (Rachels, Ch. 1; Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism, excerpt)

Tue. 09/11: The challenge of moral relativism (Rachels, Ch. 2)

Thu. 09/13: Ethics and religion (Rachels, Ch. 4)

Tue. 09/18: Ethics and civil law (Rachels, Ch. 6.1, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5; M.L. King, «Letter from Birmingham Jail»)

Thu. 09/20: Introduction to Kant

Tue. 09/25: Kant, Groundwork, Section 1 (part I)
Thu. 09/27: Kant, *Groundwork*, Section 1 (part II)

Tue. 10/02: Kant, *Groundwork*, Section 2 (part I)

Thu. 10/04: Kant, *Groundwork*, Section 2 (part II)

Tue. 10/09: Review Class

Thu. 10/11: Midterm exam

Tue. 10/23: Kantian Applications 1 (O’Neill, «Between Consenting Adults»)

Thu. 10/25: Kantian Applications 2 (Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, excerpts)

**Fri. 10/26:** Kantian Applications 3 (Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, excerpt, Benhabib, *The Rights of Others*, excerpt)

Tue. 10/30: Class Debates

Thu. 11/01: Introduction to Utilitarianism (Rachels, Ch. 7); Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 1

Tue. 11/06: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2

Thu. 11/08: Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 3-4

Tue. 11/13: The shortcomings of Utilitarianism (Rachels, Ch. 8, 9.1)


Tue. 11/20: Singer, «Famine, Affluence and Morality» and «What Should a Billionaire Give – and What Should You?»

Tue. 11/27: Movie day

Thu. 11/29: Universalistic ethics vs. ethics of care (Rachels, Ch. 11; Elshtain, «Antigone’s Daughters»

Tue. 12/04: Virtue ethics (Rachels, Ch. 12)

Thu. 12/06: Study day

Thu. 12/13: Final Exam