Spring 2-1-2001

PHIL 200E.03: Ethics - The Great Traditions

David Sherman
*University of Montana, Missoula, david.sherman@umontana.edu*

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:
This course will introduce the concepts and theories that underlie our ethical judgments. By the end of the course, you should be able to identify and critically assess the theoretical underpinnings of both your ethical positions and competing ones.

We shall begin with an exploration of the fundamental ethical concepts, knowledge of which is crucial for understanding what will follow. We shall close this introductory segment of the course by considering Alasdair MacIntyre’s charge that the (seemingly) incommensurable nature of today’s competing moral positions in our pluralistic society reflects not only our loss of the ethical life, but the very meaning of what such a life might entail. We shall then consider the ethical theories of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Mill, which, in large part, inform the nature and scope of ethical thought today. And, finally, we shall consider some of the most important attacks on these ethical theories, namely, those by Marx and Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, and existentialism (Sartre) and emotivism (Ayer) in the twentieth. The question that remains in the wake of these attacks, which MacIntyre asserts are symptomatic of contemporary life, is whether his pessimism is ultimately justified.

TEXTS:
Fac-Pac (“FP”), Excerpts from Plato’s *Crito* and the *Republic*; Aristotle’s *Politics*; Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*; Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science, Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Genealogy of Morals*; Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* and “Existentialism is a Humanism”; Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic*; and MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*

REQUIREMENTS:
Five Exams (20% each) -- First (Basic Ethical Concepts and Plato); Second (Aristotle); Third (Kant); Fourth (Mill); and Fifth (Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Ayer)

The exams are only tentatively scheduled for the dates set forth below. With the exception of the May 10 exam, I reserve the right to change these dates based upon the progress that we make in class. I shall give at least one week notice when confirming exam dates. In the event that you miss class, it is your responsibility to keep on top of changes in the schedule. Make-up exams will be arranged only in those situations in which there is an emergency or serious illness. The professor reserves the right to ask for evidence.

Although attendance records will not be kept, attendance is required, and, in any event, is necessary in order to do well in the course. Always bring the relevant text to class.
WEEK OF: READINGS:

January 29 Why Ethics?; Introduction to Ethical Concepts; MacIntyre, “The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today” (FP 1-3);

February 5 Plato, Crito (FP 4-10) and extracts from Republic, Book I (FP 11-16), Book VII (FP 17-19)

February 12 FIRST EXAM; Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book I (1-18)

February 19 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book II and III, ch. 1-5 (18-30, 30-49)

February 26 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book V, ch. 1-8 (67-80) and Book I, Chapters 9-10 from The Politics (FP 20-23); Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book X (153-171)

March 5 SECOND EXAM; Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Preface (3-8), and Sec. 1 (9-22)

March 12 Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Secs. 2-3 (22-63, 63-82)

March 19 SPRING BREAK

March 26 Criticisms of Kant’s Moral Philosophy; THIRD EXAM

April 2 Bentham’s Utilitarianism; Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapters I-II (1-5, 6-25)

April 9 Mill, Utilitarianism, Chapters III-V (26-33, 34-40, 41-63); Recent Trends in Utilitarianism; Criticisms of Utilitarianism

April 16 FOURTH EXAM; Marx, extracts from The German Ideology and the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (FP 24-25, 26-34);

April 23 Nietzsche, extracts from The Gay Science and Twilight of the Idols (FP 35-51)

April 30 Nietzsche, extract from On the Genealogy of Morals, (FP 52-57); Sartre, from “Existentialism is a Humanism” (FP 58-62)

May 7 Sartre, “Freedom and Responsibility,” (FP 63-65); Ayer, extract from Language, Truth, and Logic (FP 66-67); FIFTH EXAM