ETHICS Syllabus

PHIL 2170 FALL 2013 MWF 12:00 - 12:50 ADM 303

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Course summary:

This course provides an introduction to ethics. It is not an indoctrination course, not a religious ethics course, and not an open and unguided debate about specific ethical issues. Rather, the course examines the realm of ethics: its scope, discourse, problems, theories, issues, and nature. We will study the subject matter of ethics and the sort of thinking and reasoning specific to ethics.

Ethics is that area of the culture that deals with what we ought (not) to be and to do as persons, that is, as the <u>kind of being</u> we are, rather than as the particular <u>individuals</u> we are. But unlike science, for example, ethics is a highly controversial and problematic area of the culture. Although we find ourselves committed to ethical judgments and using ethical discourse and engaging in ethical reasoning, many cultural critics have pointed out that we are not really comfortable in the arena of ethics. We will see if those critics are correct, and if so, why ethics poses problems for us.

We will work out of our ordinary understanding of ethics. We will read stories, raise examples from real life, and consider how we actually think about and employ ethics. We will confront some abstract ethical and philosophical ideas, but they will tend to arise naturally from the concrete ethical problems, issues and reasoning we consider. Class format will be mostly lecture and guided discussion.

Expected learning outcome	Means of Assessment		
Successful students will demonstrate:	By being successful on:		
an understanding of what the subject of ethics is	Essays, position paper, midterm, analytical paper, final exam		
an awareness that deep assumptions in the culture lead us toward ethical relativism or subjectivism	Essays, midterm, final exam		
an understanding that only an ethical objectivism or realism is tenable	Midterm, final exam		
an ability to connect abstract ideas in ethics to concrete ethical cases	Position paper, midterm, final exam		
a sensitivity to ethical issues and an ability to reason about ethics	Essays, position paper, midterm, analytical paper, final exam		

Requirements and grading:

- 1) Attendance is required; you cannot learn the course on your own. In class I will sometimes elicit your grasp of the readings, lecture, and course. Your participation through questions and discussion is important, too. You need to be present, mentally active and prepared. Class participation can raise your final grade by up to 1/3 of a grade.
- 2) Short essays on the readings. These assignments are listed in the "Topics and Readings" section at the end of this syllabus. Roughly ½ to 1 pages each, these essays force you to wrestle with the readings and tell me how much you are absorbing. You may work on readings with classmates. But on written assignments, reach your own thoughts. I will drop your lowest essay grade. Late essays will not be accepted; missed essays count as "F". 20% of your grade.

- **3)** A cumulative take-home midterm exam, testing your understanding of the readings and issues and problems presented in the course. Handed out Wenesday, Oct.16th, due Wednesday, Oct. 23rd. Typed. **20% of your grade**.
- **4)** A typed 3-page position paper on an assigned case study. Assigned Friday, Nov. 8th, due Wednesday, Nov. 13th. **15% of your grade.**
 - **5)** A typed 5 page analytical paper, assigned Mon., Nov. 18^{t,h} due Mon., Nov.25th. **20% of your grade**.
- **6)** A cumulative final exam, testing your overall grasp of the course, not your memory of specific facts. Blue book required; write in pen. Exam date: Thursday, Dec 12th, 3:00--6:00pm. **25% of your grade**.

Criteria for Evaluating Writing Ability:

- **1. Content:** Writing should reflect a sufficient understanding of the relevant subject. It should make good use of the relevant concepts, distinctions, positions, and reasons included in course readings or brought out in lecture or discussion. Writing should use precise words and well-constructed sentences that clearly represent the writer's reasoning. Your work should be clearly written, its claims precise, its structure clear, with an explicit overall direction. It should be intelligible to an interested student.
- **2. Argumentation:** It should be organized so ideas are arranged logically and clearly. Main points should be backed by substantial and relevant details. Your work should be backed by good reasons. Your claims and reasons should be consistent with each other. Anticipate and respond to any reasonable objections.
- **3. Mechanics & Style:** It should adhere to conventions of grammar, capitalization, spelling, and usage. Writing style should be appropriate to the academy.
- **4. Citations and Documentation:** Writers must clearly differentiate their own material from source material. When writers use material that is not their own or not common knowledge, they must document the source of the information using a standardized (i.e., either MLA or APA) method.

Complete assignments on time. Other expectations about your writing: typed, paginated, tidy (bound if needed), standard margins/fonts, & dark print. Failure to meet these will hurt your assignment grades. Your

if needed), standard margins/fonts, & dark print. Failure to meet these will hurt your assignment grades. Your paper (not the essays) should have a cover page with name, course name/number, date, my name, and a title.

Catawba College's Writing Center offers free, one-on-one consultations to all Catawba students. Tutors have been intensely trained. They won't rewrite students' papers, but will encourage and help students at all stages of the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revising, polishing). Be prepared to discuss your assignment and to begin making revisions, with the tutor's guidance, during your session. **All** students are encouraged to use the Writing Center, open afternoons (in ADM 211) and evenings (in the Library, Study Room #5). Walk-ins are welcome, but we honor appointments first. For more information or to make an appointment, schedule online at www.catawba.edu/writingcenter. "Like" our Facebook page at facebook.com/catawbawriting.

"A"	Superior mastery	A+ 97-100	A 93-96	A- 90-92
"B"	Good mastery	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82
"C"	Satisfactory achievement	C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72
"D"	Less than satisfactory achievement	D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62
"F"	Unsatisfactory achievement			

A+ is not a possible final course grade. Grades can and should measure achievement only, not effort.

Texts:

- 1) Morality Play, by Jessica Pierce
- 2) a coursepack in the bookstore
- 3) handouts

Reading and taking notes:

I expect you to do all readings; to do well in the course, you will need to. Some of the material is easy and accessible on your first attempt. Other assignments are quite taxing and will probably require multiple readings. I suggest the following strategy for any difficult reading: read it once quickly simply to get the gist; then read it carefully for details, not worrying about the overall picture; then read it normally, fitting the details into the overall picture.

Lectures can track the readings but also range far afield. Come to class having done the readings. You are responsible for them all; the final exam will assume you have read them. Since lectures cover material not in the readings, this is another reason to attend class.

Most students take sketchy notes. Perhaps they think they cannot both take notes and listen, or perhaps they do not grasp the value of taking notes. Learn to write while you listen; it can be done, and it usually enhances your grasp of what is said. Take as many notes as you can, without losing too much of what is said. Writing down only key terms and definitions is not enough in this class. Your notes are an invaluable resource for understanding the course and for the final exam.

Absences and violations:

To keep attendance--and learn your names--I will institute a seating chart in the third class meeting. Choose a permanent seat; see me to change it. I will use the chart to check attendance promptly at the start of class. If late, you might be counted absent; if late enough, you do count as absent. Avoid tardiness; if you are often late (sans good reason), I will choose to count you as absent. Sleeping and other forms of mental disconnect in class count as an absence. When absent, you are responsible for missed assignments and classroom material. Get notes from a classmate. If you still have questions, you may contact me.

No absences are excused. After 3 penalty-free absences, which you needn't explain to me, further ones lower your final grade: minus 1/3 grade for 4-5 total absences, 2/3 for 6-8, minus 1 grade for 9-10. Missing class right before or after a vacation counts as a double absence. Over 10 absences for other than an emergency is automatic grounds for an "F" (or an "I"), regardless of your grades. Tell me if there is an emergency. Provide documentation if you are missing class due to required school-sponsored activities.

Respect the people and ideas in our class. I don't care if you bring a drink, sport a hat, or wear rags. I do care that you pay attention to me and to others (so, no phones or activated pagers/beepers/watches), you are on time and ready to work, you bring a positive attitude to class even if you are struggling, and you contribute positively to class.

Cheating, working with another to complete individual assignments (unless specifically allowed), and falsifying an emergency to skip class or an assignment, all violate the Honor Code. So does plagiarism, employing a writer's ideas (and even words) without giving the writer due credit. See me for help about borrowing someone's ideas or words for your use. No electronic devices are allowed in an exam, except for simple watches, computers (if specifically allowed), and needed medical devices. Specifically, phones and any devices that allow for texting are prohibited. Violation of this policy can result in an "F" for that exam.

Topics and Readings

1) What is Ethics? Handout

Are morality and ethics different? How are ethics and the philosophy of ethics related?

Cultural Problems with Ethics

2) David Brooks: "If it Feels Right..." handout

What happened to our understanding of morality? Why? What are the effects in our lives?

3) "Is Anyone to Blame for Anything Anymore?" handout

What happened to the idea of moral blame? Does that relate to our conception of morality?

4) Tom Regan: "How Not to Answer Moral Questions" handout

What four misconceptions about morality does Regan address? What is Regan's concern? <u>ESSAY #1</u>: How does Regan critique some typical conceptions of morality?

5) Christina Hoff Sommers: "Teaching the Virtues" handout

What are Sommers' concerns? Do we feel comfortable judging "public morality" and not "private morality"? What implications does this comfort/discomfort have for teaching ethics?

ESSAY #2: What is Sommers' critique of how ethics courses are typically taught?

Recommended readings:

available on request

"You Are Who You Are, Now What You Do", "Why Aren't We Shocked?" "Can We Stop Evil?", "Understanding Empathy: Can You Feel My Pain?"

II. The Scope of Ethics

6) "Etiquette and Ethics" handout

What distinguishes ethics from etiquette? Are there also connections between them?

7) "Actions, Intentions, and Consequences" handout

What is an act? How is it related to intentions and to consequences? What distinctions do we draw about acts?

8) summary of Joseph Conrad's <u>Lord Jim</u> handout

Is there any more to ethics than the overt acts we perform or fail to perform (well or poorly)? What is character? Is it an ethical issue? How are actions related to character?

9) Joyce Carol Oates, "Four Summers" cp

The Greeks believed a family/lineage could be "cursed". Is Sissie "cursed"? A character structure, passed from parent to child, can trap instead of free. Are there moral implications? If a culture values an immoral character structure, is that culture immoral?

ESSAY #3: Describe Sissie's character structure. What is immoral about it?

10) W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" handout

What does Clifford contend is part of ethics? Why? Why does he then shift the discussion by saying, "It might be said that...." Which of his own lessons is he here trying to live up to? What are his arguments against his opponents?

ESSAY #4: Why fault the owner if his ship doesn't sink? Why is it a moral fault?

11) Emmett Barcalow, "Universal versus Absolute Principles" cp

What distinguishes a universal moral judgment from an absolute one? Why think there can be no absolute moral principles? Is there any reason, then, to formulate "unqualified" principles?

Recommended readings:

available on request

"The Doctors Who Are Redefining Life and Death"

III. Pre-modern Ethics: Ethics is Objective

12) Plato: excerpt from "The Republic" cp

Glaucon asks why ethics is good, i.e., why be ethical? Glaucon holds that ethics is bad, requiring people to act against their self-interest. His "ring of Gyges" story illustrates his view that people wouldn't act ethically if they could get away with acting unethically. How does Socrates respond? Does ethics go beyond what we take to be our self-interest? How are ethics and self-interest related? What does Plato contend is the foundation of ethics?

13) Epictetus cp

What is the will? What does it do? What does it control? Does anything control it? What is (not) fully in our control? What does the issue of control imply for how to live? What produces happiness? Why and how should our will be "in harmony with the will of Nature"?

ESSAY #5: What is his account of the moral life and how we achieve it?

Recommended readings:

available on request

Aristotle on Ethics: "The Good Life"

IV. The Problem of Ethics in the Modern Era

14) Robert Bellah, "The Pursuit of Happiness" cp

What do these sociological interviews show about people's moral lives show? What underlying commitment(s) about the nature of morality do all these people have? Why is Bellah concerned about their commitments?

ESSAY #6: What do all four implicitly believe about the nature of morality?

15) C. S. Lewis, excerpt from The Abolition of Man cp

What does Lewis see as the implications (for ethics) of "The Green Book"? Why are its authors so concerned about "debunking" feelings and emotions? On what ground does Lewis disagree? What is his basis for talking about "right" feelings, the feelings we ought to have? What philosophical issue does he see as the basis for his disagreement with those authors? What implication does that issue have for the distinction between education and propaganda?

16) David Hume on "Understanding Morality" cp (& Treatise, pp.414-16, handout)
Why does Hume contend that feelings (passions) are non-rational, that reason is disconnected from ethics, and that our ends are subjective? What implications are there for the possibility of moral truth and falsehood?

Recommended readings:

available on request

"There's More to Life Than Being Happy" Elshtain: "Judge Not"

V. Finding an Objective Foundation for Ethics

17) Emmett Barcalow, "Morality and Religion" cp

Why think there is some standard for judging principles, laws, and moral judgments? Why do some people contend that religion provides that standard? Why locate the religious standard in God's command? What is the Divine Command Theory and its two main versions? How does the theory help with the issue of wanting to follow moral dictates? Are there problems with the theory? Can we know what God wants--without error? Has our understanding of God changed over time? Can we take X to be a Divine Command unless X agrees with what we take (or will take) to be good? Is there a problem inherent in grounding ethics in religion?

ESSAY #7: Why are attempts to ground ethics in religion problematic?

18) Exodus excerpts handout

In Chapter 22 and 23, there are many Divine commands, some ritual and some ethical. Are we to follow them (all)? The one about the "first-born" in 22:28? The one about the poor in 23:10? After the usual "10 Commandments" in Chapter 20, what of the Chapter 34 version?

19) Stanley Milgram, "Obediance to Authority" handout

What was Milgram testing? What did he expect to find? What did he find? What was the ethical dimension of his experiment? Who "passed" the ethical test? Why? Who failed"? Why? Is there a problem inherent in grounding ethics in authority?

ESSAY #8: Why are attempts to ground ethics in authority problematic?

20) Bruno Bettelheim, excerpt from <u>A Good Enough Parent</u> cp

Why is Bettelheim so wary about issuing general parental advice in the form of rules, such as "Do X" or "Do not do Y".? Aren't rules important or even necessary? Can't we live by them? What problems are inherent in being rule-governed?

ESSAY #9: Why are attempts to ground ethics in rules or principles problematic?

21) E. M. Adams, excerpt from "Ethics and the Aims of Education" handout

Why does Adams claim that feelings tell us about reality? What essential characteristics do feelings have? What does he think this forces us to accept? What is a "value"? What is moral virtue? Is there a problem with grounding ethics in feelings and emotions?

Recommended readings: available on request

Adams: "Ethics and the Aims of Education" complete article

VI. Ethics and Personhood

22) E. M. Adams, "Persons and Morality" cp

How does personhood relate to morality? What does moral discourse tell us about living a life? How does living a life require that one have a self-image? What does he contend is the defining responsibility of personhood? Does it matter what sort of life we live? What are the two different accounts of the moral purpose of life? Which does Adams accept, and why?

23) Roger Eddy, "The Afternoon Tarzan Came to Tea"; and "The Day I Threw the Football Game" cp

What do these stories show about how to reach good judgments, about character development, about virtues and vices, and about testing one's moral judgments?

ESSAY #10: What is the moral dimension of the first story?

24) M. Scott Peck, "The Case of the Spider Phobia" c

What is Billie's life like? Why does she go into psychotherapy? What does she discover about her life? What does she discover about her mother? What does she discover about her spider phobia? What is a phobia? What does her therapist help her realize? What is the nature of the evil here?

25) Kevin Bales, "The New Slavery" cp

The title of Bales' book is <u>Disposable People</u>. What does he mean? What distinguishes the "old" slavery from the "new"? What does slavery do to a person? Is it morally wrong? <u>ESSAY #11</u>: Why is slavery immoral?

26) Philip Hallie, "From Cruelty to Goodness" cp

What does cruelty amount to? What does it affect in a human being? In what way does Hallie connect cruelty to power? Why isn't kindness the opposite of cruelty? What does the case of Le Chambon show about cruelty and its opposite? What does it show about the people of Le Chambon? Why does Hallie reject the view in the letter from Massachusetts?

27) Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" cp

What ethical judgments and principles does King defend? What does he think justifies them? How does he ethically justify civil disobedience? Whom does he believe is ethically at fault? How does he think one must prepare oneself for it? Why? Does he contend that there is a necessary connection between morality and community?

Recommended readings:

available on request

Adams: "Character"

"From horror, a swelling tide of reform"

"At uprisings' core: 'I am a man'"

"Under tyranny, eventually man revolts"

"J. C. Penney stops selling 'Too pretty for homework' shirt"

Benson: "Who is the Autonomous Man"?

Glaspell: "A Jury of Her Peers"

Benn: "Wickedness"

Walzer: excerpt from Just and Unjust Wars