COURSE OUTLINE

Course Title: Ethics
Course Number: PHL-107
CRN: 93175
Semester: Fall 2010
Instructor: John J. Barrett
Meeting Days: Mondays Wednesdays
Meeting Times: 3:30 – 4:45 P.M.
Meeting Place: Corchaug C-06
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PHL 107 Ethics F10 Course Website: www2.sunysuffolk.edu/barretj

I) Objectives of The Course:

We begin our efforts to explore this discipline with a brief attempt to situate ourselves in the current discussions about the origin and nature of Ethics with reference to the task of freedom.

After getting our footing with the vocabulary of ethical terms and an introduction to the distinctiveness of ethical reasoning, we first will examine the development of ethical theory in the Modern Period since the Enlightenment. Our focus will be the three distinctly modern approaches to ethics and their foundational thinkers: Utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill), Deontology (Immanuel Kant) and Moral Sense Theory (David Hume and Adam Smith). In addition, we will learn about the antecedent culture of philosophy, science, religion, politics and economics that gave rise to these theories.

Next we turn to the work of the philosopher, Friederich Nietzsche (1844-1900). It is the opinion of many ethicists that his work is pivotal in the history of Ethics in the Western Humanities. On the one hand, he is critical of Modern ethical theories listed above. He rejects the universal rules of Deontology (which he thought of as abstractions) as well as the focus on pleasure and utility of Utilitarianism (which he considered vulgar). In his mind, neither of these approaches to ethics offers the possibility of personal excellence and achievement (which he sees in ancient Greek Virtue Theory) and
thinks are essential to the ethical life at the turn of the century.

On the other hand, he lays the groundwork for postmodern efforts in ethical thought in his penetrating analysis of these foundations. Consequently, we will then read excerpts from the three periods of his main body of work. These contain his criticism of the efforts of the modern theorists and also the concepts he offered as a guide to a future approach to ethics.

We then enter into a consideration of two questions that continue to occupy the minds and the discussions of contemporary individuals: Rights and Justice.

The third part of the course will be an exploration of the theory of Virtue Ethics. Although Nietzsche himself relied on both images and concepts from ancient Greek virtue theory in his thought, recent retrievals of an ethics of virtue have both challenged his assumptions as well as those of modern ethical theory. A theorist such as Alasdair MacIntyre would go so far as to suggest that the contemporary question for ethics is, “Nietzsche or Aristotle?” In this section, we will review the recent history of the retrieval of Virtue Ethics from ancient Greek philosophical thought and explore some contemporary models of virtue theory.

The final part of the course takes a look at recent topics in ethics (Religion, Gender and Race, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism in the context of postmodern philosophical reflection. We will explore two approaches to postmodern ethics which focus on the “Other” as opposed to the concentration on individual “rights talk” found in modern ethics. The first is the philosophical work about saints, heroes and rogues found in work of Edith Wyschogrod (and some of her antecedents – J.O. Urmson and Susan Wolf). The second is an exploration of the work of Emmanuel Levinas who speaks of our obligation to the face of the “Other”.

The course will conclude with suggestions for further exploration in ethics as well as its connections to systems of moral thought.

Although it might seem from the course outline that this effort is weighted toward the study of names and theories of ethics, this would be a misunderstanding. In our conversation with these theorists and their theories, we will find ourselves right in the middle of pressing questions and issues in our hearts and minds and the communities in which we live. However, in placing some distance between them and ourselves as this course will urge, we will hopefully find our own approaches to ethics expanded and, because of this, better able to take up the challenges before us.

In summary form, this course has the following objectives:

1. to offer special attention to the discussion of ethical questions in our society;
2. to develop greater competency and articulation skills for use in these discussions through an examination of some foundational questions of moral description and language;
3. to study the three historical approaches to ethics that we have received in Western Moral
Philosophy: deontology, utilitarianism and virtue ethics;
4. to help develop a fuller notion of practical reasoning;
5. to understand the critical nature of moral description in moral analysis; and,
6. to assist students in growing in their sense of ethical self-direction.
7. to raise some of the larger questions in ethics today such as: Feminist Ethics, Ethical and Cultural Relativism and Restorative Justice

II) Procedures for Accomplishing These Objectives:

1. Through class presentations and guided readings of texts, students will explore a survey of the foundational ideas used in comprehensive systems of ethics.
2. Each class will consist of three foci:
   a) recitation of assigned textual reading and colloquy with the instructor and other students;
   b) presentation of thematic material; and,
   c) discussion of the ethical questions raised by the class presentation.

III) Student Requirements For Completion Of The Course:

1. Reading of assigned text and reference material.
2. Participation in class discussions.
3. Submission of a term assignment. (See Addendum)
4. Completion of Examinations. (See Addendum)

IV) Grading Practices:

The Final Grade will be determined by the following criteria:
1) Examinations (40%): Six will be held. The two lowest marks will be dropped. No substitute examinations will be offered.
2) Term Assignment (40%)
3) Attendance and Class Recitation: (20%) Absences and lateness will be deducted from this mark.

VI) Rules Concerning Student Absence and Lateness:

Attendance Policy (As stated in the Faculty Handbook):

"The College expects that each student will exercise personal responsibility with regard to class attendance. All students are expected to attend every class session of each course for which they are registered. Students are responsible for all that transpires in class whether or not they are in attendance. The College defines excessive absence or lateness as more than the equivalent of one week of class meetings during the semester. Excessive absence or lateness may lead to failure in a course or removal from the class roster. A student may be removed from the class roster by an instructor at any time when in the judgment of the instructor absence has been excessive or when other valid reasons exist.

Any special circumstances that might compromise the learning process should be
communicated to the instructor in anticipation of occurrence or as soon as possible so that a review of a student's participation in the course can be initiated.

VI) **Textbook:**


The course text will be supplemented by handouts distributed by the instructor
The handouts will be supplemented by audio-visuals

VII) **Outline Of Topics To Be Covered:**

**Presentations:**

*Prior to Class*  

 **8/30** *Introduction*: The Task of Freedom

 **9/1** The Task of Freedom:  
Physical Dimension  
Psychological Dimension  
Social Dimension  
Interpretive Dimension

 **9/8** Ethical Terms

 **9/13** Ethical Reasoning I  
25-54

 **9/15** Ethical Reasoning II  
99-126

 **9/20** Psychological and Ethical Realism

 **9/22** Modernity and Ethics  
129-160

 **9/27** Utilitarianism

 **9/29** Utilitarianism

 **10/4** Utilitarianism  
166-188

 **10/6** Deontology

 **10/11** Deontology
10/13 Deontology

10/18 Moral Sense Theory: David Hume and Adam Smith

10/20 Nietzsche the Critic of Ethics

10/25 Nietzsche and *Ressentiment* 195-225

10/27 The Ethics of Rights

11/1 The Ethics of Rights 233-255

11/3 Justice

11/8 Justice 259-288

11/10 Virtue Ethics

11/15 Virtue Ethics

11/17 Virtue Ethics

11/22 Virtue Ethics 61-92

11/29 Ethics and Religion

12/1 Ethics and Religion 295-319

12/6 Ethics of Diversity: Gender

12/8 Ethics of Diversity: Gender 323-349

12/13 Ethics of Diversity: Race, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism

12/15 *Conclusion*: Ethical Advising