

Ethics and Society

Professor Jamie Lindsay

Fall 2012

PHIL 3306

Section: R12

Code: 0527

Thursdays 1-3:30pm

Room: 4145B

Office Hours: By appointment

email: JLindsay@GC.CUNY.edu

In this course we will explore a several approaches to philosophical ethics, and apply these theoretical approaches to difficult questions that arise in social and political life. You will have ample opportunity to develop your abilities to think and write about philosophical questions, to practice giving reasons for your views, and to consider opposing arguments carefully. The focus of the course will be on classroom discussion, with the aim of encouraging you to develop your own views in dialogue with the texts and with each other.

Final Grade:

Blackboard Discussion (before each class): 25%

Short Papers (2): 25%

Presentations (2): 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Course Requirements:

1. You are expected to read all assigned texts *before* the meeting for which they are assigned, and to bring printed copies of any readings posted on Blackboard.
 - a. Most readings will be from the required textbook: *Knowledge, Reality & Values*, Lindsay and Shottenkirk.
 - b. Extended versions of all readings will also be posted on Blackboard, for your use in deeper exploration of the material, though these longer versions are optional reading.
2. Before class, you are required to post your reflections and/or questions about all readings that we will discuss.
 - a. Approximately one-hundred word posts are sufficient, and you are encouraged to use the Discussion Board as an opportunity to debate the material.

- b. Any sincere effort at engaging all assigned readings will receive an 'A' for the day, and posts that are not satisfactory (largely because too short) will receive a 'B' for the day. Failure to post will earn an 'F' for the day's assignment.
 - c. You are encouraged to use your Discussion Board posts to prepare for class, by reviewing and debating the central ideas of the readings with your classmates.
3. You are expected to attend all classes, having done the reading, and to review your notes from previous sessions before attending class.
- a. According to the Brooklyn College Bulletin: "Students are expected to attend all scheduled sessions of every class for which they register. Students late for class may be excluded from the room. An instructor may consider attendance and class participation in determining course grade."
 - b. Lateness, absences, and lack of positive participation (or any negative participation) will affect your final grade dramatically.
4. Two short papers (two to three pages) will be assigned in class.
- a. If you fail to receive the assignment due to an unexcused absence, this will *not* be an excuse for failing to turn in the assignment.
 - b. Papers may be revised once, *after discussion of your work in Office Hours*, and work that shows genuine improvement will receive an appropriately increased grade.
5. Two 5-10m group presentations are required.
- a. Powerpoint (PC) or Keynote (Mac) Slideshows are required for the presentations (Mac laptops may be checked out in the library, if needed), and you should make an effort to use relevant media to accent your presentation (humor works here).
 - b. Presentations should focus primarily on accurately representing the argument(s) of the author.
 - c. Research is encouraged, though not required.
 - d. Secondarily, should you offer your responses to the author's argument(s).
 - e. You need not agree with other members of your group, in assessing the author's work. A clear presentation of your disagreements with one another would be a helpful and productive contribution.
6. The Final Exam questions will be distributed prior to the end of the semester. The Exam will consist of short-answer questions requiring at most three sentences each.
7. By the end of the course you should be able to:
- a. Articulate the basic features of several approaches to philosophical ethics
 - b. State differences between deontological ethics, consequentialist ethics, virtue ethics, and existentialist ethics
 - c. Apply the tools of these approaches to ethics to contemporary social issues
 - d. Evaluate ethical arguments using basic tools of critical thinking
 - e. Develop your own arguments concerning ethical issues in society

- f. Identify and state serious objections to your own ethical views

NY Policy on Religious Observance

Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable, because of their religious beliefs, to attend classes on a particular day or days shall, because of such absence on the particular day or days, be excused from any examination or any study or work requirements. It shall be the responsibility of the faculty to make available to each student who is absent from school, because of religious beliefs, an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which they may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days. Any student who is aggrieved by the alleged failure of any faculty or administrative officials to comply in good faith shall be entitled to maintain an action or proceeding in the supreme court of the county in which such institution of higher education is located for the enforcement of their rights.

CUNY Policy on Disability

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services, please provide me with the course accommodation form and discuss specific accommodation needed with me immediately.

CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at this site: <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits that violation, the faculty member MUST report the violation. Copying text from Wikipedia without proper citation counts as plagiarism.

I. Introduction to Philosophical Ethics: Virtue Ethics, Consequentialism & Deontology

- 9/30: Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, Poverty"
John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*
- 9/6: "Critical Thinking: Form and Content"
Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?"
- 9/13: Plato, *Apology*
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I & II *
- 9/20: Thomas Hobbes, from *Leviathan*
Mary Wollstonecraft, from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* *
- 9/27: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*
Onora O'Neill, "On Public Reason"

- 10/4: Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre" (Bb) *
Judith Butler, "Peace Is Resistance to the Terrible Satisfaction of War" *

II. Ethics and Society

- 10/11: Fyodor Dostoyevsky, from *Brothers Karamazov*
Friedrich Nietzsche, from *Beyond Good and Evil* *
- 10/18: Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor" *
Albert Camus, from *Myth of Sisyphus*
- 10/25: Simone de Beauvoir, from *Ethics of Ambiguity*
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*
Linda Martín Alcoff, "In Arizona, Censoring Questions about Race" *
- 11/1: President George W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11" (Bb)
Michael Walzer, "The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success)" *
Jürgen Habermas, "Interpreting the Fall of a Monument"
- 11/8: Current publications on the circumcision debate in Germany (Bb)
Martha Nussbaum and John Finnis, "Is Homosexual Conduct Wrong?" *
- 11/15: Current publications on the drone warfare debate (Bb)
Tariq Ramadan: "An International Call for Moratorium on Corporal Punishment, Stoning, and the Death Penalty in the Islamic World" *
- 11/22: *No class*
- 11/29: Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"
Walking Dead, "Pretty Much Dead Already" (viewed in class)
- 12/6: *Closing discussion*
- 12/20: 1-3pm: FINAL EXAM (open notes, but not open book)

* Readings available for group presentations