Ethics
PH 211-001

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Spring semester, 2006 email: mrohlf@skidmore.edu
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Ladd 206 Office hours: Tues 2:30-5:30

Course Description
In this course we investigate some of the central questions in moral philosophy: for example, how are we to understand the idea of a good human life? What is the relationship between a good life and morality? Can we identify some fundamental principle or criterion for moral judgments? Are moral judgments objective, and can moral disagreements be resolved rationally? Finally, why do we care so much about right and wrong, and give judgments about them special authority? Readings are from both historical and contemporary sources. We study primary texts from each of the two most influential traditions in modern moral philosophy - Immanuel Kant’s *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and John Stuart Mill’s *Utilitarianism* (1861) - as well as some important works in 20th century moral philosophy and by contemporary writers. This course is accessible to students with no prior coursework in philosophy.

Required Texts
· A coursepacket containing most of the course readings will be distributed in class

Policies and Grading
I. Summary
Grades in this course will be based on the following four components:
· Attendance, participation, and journal: 25%
· Paper #1: 25% - Due in my mailbox by 4:30pm on Wednesday, March 1
· Paper #2: 25% - Due in my mailbox by 4:30pm on Wednesday, April 12
· Final exam: 25% - Wednesday, May 10 from 9:00am-12:00pm in Ladd 206

II. Attendance
The Skidmore Faculty Handbook establishes the college's minimum expectation that "any students who miss more than a third of the [class] sessions may expect to be barred from final examination. In such cases, the course grade will be recorded as F." Since this course has 27 sessions this term, any student with 10 or more absences automatically fails the course. In addition to this College policy, I also have the following strict attendance policy. Students with 7 or more absences will receive an F for the entire 25% portion of the course grade allocated for attendance, participation, and journal, regardless of their participation while in class or the quality and quantity of their journal entries. For students with 0-6 absences, however, attendance will count for 1/3 of the 25% portion of the course grade allocated for attendance, participation, and journal (i.e., 8.33% of the total course grade). Students with 0-1 absences will receive an A, students with 2 absences will receive a B+, students with 3 absences will receive a B-,
with 4 absences will receive a C, students with 5 absences will receive a D+, and students with 6 absences will receive an F for this portion of their course grade. These policies apply to absences from class for any reason except for serious illness or the death of a friend or family member. Absences for all other reasons, including minor illness and sports competitions, will not be “excused.”

**III. Participation**

Except in the case noted above under “attendance,” participation in this course counts for 1/3 of the 25% portion of the course grade allocated for attendance, participation, and journal (i.e., 8.33% of the total course grade). The sort of participation expected is positive, informed, and regular contributions to class discussion. A positive contribution is relevant to the topic under discussion and respectful of all participants. Participation is informed when it reflects your having read and thought about the assigned readings before the class period for which they are assigned. Since this is a relatively large class, participating regularly means speaking up (e.g., asking or responding to a question) or at least raising your hand and trying to get involved in class discussion on average about once a week. Please note that the quality of your contributions to class discussion counts more than their quantity. Always feel free to ask questions and to express informed opinions in class.

**IV. Journal**

Studying philosophy involves a lot of reading and thinking for yourself about philosophical problems and arguments, in addition to discussing these problems and arguments with others who may not agree with you or see the issues at stake in quite the same way. For this reason, and again because this is a relatively large class, students in this course are required to keep an online journal and to record at least one entry per week totaling about one page or 350-400 words. The point of the journal is to help you stay regularly engaged with the course material outside of class and to provide a private forum (other students cannot read your journal) for articulating ideas and questions related to the assigned readings and class discussions each week. I will end each class period with questions to help guide you through the reading assigned for the following class, and you may choose to address these questions in your journal entries. You will get the most out of this journal if you use it both to address assigned readings before the class period in which we discuss them, and to return in later entries to the same questions and ideas as they arise in different contexts and authors. The journal counts for 1/3 of the 25% portion of the course grade allocated for attendance, participation, and journal (i.e., 8.33% of the total course grade), except in the case noted above under “attendance.” You will get full credit by making at least one entry of the required length and reflecting adequate effort during at least 11 of the 13 weeks of the semester. If you make appropriate entries during 10 weeks, then the grade for your journal will be an A-. If you make appropriate entries during 9 weeks, then your grade will be a B+, and so on. Please note that it is not the number of entries that counts, but rather the number of weeks during which you make an appropriate entry, because the point of the journal is to facilitate (and reflect) regular engagement with the course material outside of class. So making multiple entries during a single week does not compensate for neglecting to make entries during other weeks. Time and date stamps are automatically placed on all entries recorded in your online journal. Notes, outlines, and lists of ideas do not constitute adequate journal entries. To access your journal, go to [http://webct.skidmore.edu](http://webct.skidmore.edu) and log in, select this class, then follow instructions.
V. Papers and exam
There are two 5-7 page papers and a final exam in this course. Submitting both papers and taking the final exam are required in order to pass the course. I will supply topics for each paper assignment, and you must write on one of these topics unless I give you permission to write on some other topic. Paper #1 will be on the well-being unit, and paper #2 will be on the ethical theory unit. The final exam will be cumulative but will emphasize the unit on skepticism about value. We will spend time in class discussing how to write a philosophy paper. It is my policy not to read rough drafts of papers in advance of their due date (except in special cases), because I find this to be either unfair to students who do not have me read rough drafts of their papers or unhelpful to those who do. But I am more than happy to discuss with you ideas that you are writing about in your papers. Please note that I have a strict late paper policy. Papers that are not handed in by their due date and time are automatically docked 1/3 of a full grade: for example, if you wrote a B+ paper, then you will receive a B for that assignment. For every day that passes after the due date in which the paper has not been submitted, the grade will be reduced by another 1/3 of a full grade. (This includes Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, since a late paper can be submitted by email anytime). The last possible day to submit a paper is the day that I return that assignment to the class. If you require an extension, and have a good reason for being exempted from the late paper policy, then you must speak with me at least 48 hours before the assignment is due. If I grant you an extension, then a new due date will be agreed upon. The standard late policy will then apply to the new negotiated due date. I will not grant extensions after two days before the deadline (at least not without a note from a doctor). Finally, if you are dissatisfied with your grade on a paper, then I will be happy to discuss how you might have improved it. However, if you wish to appeal the grade that you have been assigned, then you must submit to me in writing the reasons you believe that your paper has been improperly assessed, citing evidence from the paper or exam to support your case. Oral appeals for a grade change will not be entertained.

VI. Important Note
These assignments and policies are designed to challenge you and to help you get the most out of this class. But in the end, you will get out of the class only as much as you put into it. If you are having trouble understanding the readings, participating in class discussion, or doing the written work, then please come talk with me about it. If you cannot make it to my office hours, then send me an email and we will arrange another time to meet.
Topics and readings
All dates are tentative. Please do each reading before the class for which it is assigned.

Jan.24: Introduction

I. Well-Being and the Good Life
   A. Well-being
      Jan.26: Plato, Republic, Book I
      Jan.31: Alain DeBotton, “Consolation for not having enough money”
      Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best”
      Feb.9: Richard Kraut, “Desire and the Human Good”
      Joseph Raz, “Duties of Well-Being”
   B. Death
      Feb.14: Thomas Nagel, “Death”
      Feb.16: Joel Feinberg, “Death and Posthumous Harms”
      Feb.21: David Velleman, “Well-Being and Time”

II. Ethical Theory
   A. Utilitarianism and the Demands of Morality
      Feb.23: John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Bk. I and begin Bk. II (pp.1-12)
      Feb.28: Mill, Utilitarianism, finish Bk. II (pp.12-26)
      **Wednesday, March 1: Paper #1 due in my mailbox by 4:30pm**
      March 2: Mill, Utilitarianism, Bk. V (pp.42-64)
      March 7: Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”
      Jason Fagone, “What if Zell Kravinsky Isn’t Crazy?”
      March 9: Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal”
      March 14 and 16: No class (Spring Break)
   B. Kant and Respect for Persons
      March 21: Thomas Nagel, “War and Massacre”
      March 23: Immanuel Kant, Grounding…, preface and first section (pp.1-17)
      March 28: Kant, Grounding, begin second section (pp.19-33)
      March 30: Kant, Grounding, finish second section (pp.34-48)
      April 4: Onora O’Neill, “Ending World Hunger”

III. Skepticism about Value
   A. Subjectivism
      April 6: Plato, Euthyphro
      James Rachels, “Subjectivism”
      April 11: G.E. Moore, “The Subject Matter of Ethics”
      **Wednesday, April 12: Paper #2 due in my mailbox by 4:30pm**
      April 18: Charles Stevenson, “Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms”
      April 20: Philippa Foot, “Moral Arguments”
   B. Relativism
      April 25: James Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”
      April 27: Stuart Hampshire, “Morality and Convention”
      May 2: Philippa Foot, “Morality and Art”

Final exam: Wednesday, May 10 from 9:00am-12:00pm in Ladd 206