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PHIL 1730
M, W 2 - 2:50 Wilson 301
Spring 2015
Office hours: M 3 -5 and by appointment

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS SYLLABUS

I. Required Texts (more or less in the order that we will take them up)

Bible
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*
F. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*
Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork*
Plato, *Symposium*

In addition we will post on Collab extracts from David Hume and Albert Camus

II. Scope and Goals of the Course

Each of us has a strong interest in leading as good a life as we possibly can. Because living as a hermit isn't likely to be much fun (even if it's possible), the life you lead will be among others. That's good – but it's also not so good. Because each of those others has ideas about what is and isn't acceptable, we can't simply do what we want to do because it suits our own preferences. How people may best understand and pursue the good life for themselves while simultaneously affording due respect to others is the subject matter of *Ethics*.

Ethics is one of the subfields of Philosophy; that's why this course has the prefix PHIL. It is not only philosophers, however, who have given serious thought to the two central questions of Ethics. Long before there even was such a field as Philosophy, priests, prophets, poets and run-of-the-mill folks like you and me have turned their minds to these issues. For obvious reasons we can't do more than dip into these vast traditions of thoughts; indeed if we spent all four of your years in Charlottesville in that inquiry we still would just be scratching the surface. Consider this syllabus, then, a tasting menu of the richness that is Ethics. Like any good tasting menu it will display interesting contrasts and variations among its various yummy items. You will meet in the weeks that follow both philosophers and non-philosophers. The philosophers will agree on some things and disagree about others. The oldest of the writings go back more than 2000 years, the newer ones come from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Does this all hang together? That's for us to determine as we make our way through PHIL 1730.

III. Format of the Course

1. *Readings; Classroom work.* These are *terrific* books and extracts from books! As you might have guessed, we'll read only a very little bit of the bible, but these are choice passages. We'll read a few sections from Smith's *TMS* and only the first two parts of Kant's *Groundwork*. The others texts will be read in their entirety. That includes Dostoevsky's rather fat *Crime and Punishment*. The good news is that it's a novel, one that is truly wonderful. Once you get started with it I predict you'll have a hard time putting it down. The other good news is that with the fortunate timing of Spring semester, you'll be able to turn pages while lying on the beach of Cancun (or, if you're not quite so fortunate, lying on your bed). Hume's *Treatise* and Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* are wonderful books too, and I'd be very pleased if you chose to pick up copies and read them in their entirety. In all honesty, though, I can't advise it. Instead I offer you prime excerpts on Collab. The reading schedule is given below in IV.

Let me give you fair warning: you will almost certainly find some of the material difficult to understand, at least on first encounter. Although I don't expect you to sail through these readings effortlessly, I do expect you to give them your best shot. That includes your having carefully read assigned material *in advance of the class in which it will be discussed*, and also your willingness to *reread* sections that initially prove elusive. Our job in class will be to work together to understand the problems addressed by these authors. I think of this as being very much a joint enterprise. My role and that of the Tas is one of exploring with you points of special interest, helping to clarify complexities, raising questions implied by the material. Correlatively, your responsibilities are to read and think conscientiously about all texts and to be prepared to tell us what you find perplexing or challenging or worthy of deeper pursuit. Although this is a lecture class with a rather enormous number of bodies in the room, I'm actually going to try to bring a little bit of discussion into the lecture hall. I'll begin each class by devoting a few minutes to taking questions you might have. Because the room is vast, let me request that if you wish to ask a question, please sit in one of the rows near the front. I also like to ask questions from time to time, so here's fair warning: I claim the right to ask you what you think. If you hate this idea, sit near the back of the room and you're probably safe. (Try not to snore though.) Why these attempts to simulate a conversation? Personally I can think of nothing duller than a class in which one person (me) does all the talking. I hope you agree and that you will contribute your side.

2. *Computers, Phones, etc.* 21st Century electronics are wonderful! I love them as much as you do – well, almost as much. I must tell you, however, that they don't have a place in PHIL 1730. If you're carrying a phone, please make sure you turn it off and put it out of sight (and possibly out of mind) before the start of class. If your ringer goes off, or if you are observed staring intently into a display, you owe a 500-word essay on the topic of the day, due at the next class meeting. If it happens a second time you will be asked to withdraw from the course. With some reluctance I also ask you not to open a computer during class. These machines have wonderful utility, but they also offer powerful

temptations, not only to the user but to those nearby. Try taking notes the old-fashioned way: pen in hand. Or you may record class sessions for later review and transcription.

3. *Tests and Quizzes.* The only exam that will be given is a final exam. It will count for approximately 40% of your course grade. It will involve some form of essay questions. Further information concerning the nature of the exam will be supplied in class.

Occasional unannounced quizzes will be given. These will involve very specific questions requiring short answers. No deep understanding is required to do well on quizzes; rather, they will test whether you have done the readings and listened to lectures with some care. **Quizzes cannot be made up**; once missed it's eternally gone. I shall, however, drop your lowest quiz result. (If more than eight quizzes are given, your two lowest scores will be dropped.) This means that if you must miss a class or two during the semester there should not be any significant impact on your course performance even if you happen to be unlucky with regard to quiz timing; more than occasional absences are another story. These quizzes will count cumulatively for approximately 25% of your course grade.

4. *Papers.* I shall ask you at irregular intervals to write short (4-7 pages) papers in response to particular questions I'll toss your way. You are required to write any 2 of them, and you may submit 3, with the 2 best counting toward your course grade. Thus, if one (or perhaps two) of the assignment topics or times doesn't suit you, then you should feel free to skip it. There will be at least 4 papers assigned. These may either address the writings of one of the authors we are reading or involve comparison between two or more. Unless you have received explicit permission to the contrary, all submissions must be hard copy. Please retain the digital file just in case something goes awry. Cumulatively, they will determine approximately 30% of your PHIL 1730 grade.

All paper assignments will involve working through some problem suggested by the assigned readings. Although you are entirely at liberty to consult any sources written or human that you think might help you to write a better paper, it is imperative that any borrowings of ideas or language be credited via a citation. You may use whatever style of footnote or endnote you please just so long as full attribution information is provided. Failures to do so, even if not malicious, risk putting you on the wrong side of the plagiarism divide. That is definitely not a place you want to be!

Paper grades will be based on "content" rather than style or grammatical correctness (although it should be noted that your ability to express yourself accurately in written English prose very definitely affects the content as it appears to your reader). However, any paper that comes to me with more than a very few errors in spelling, grammar, etc. will either be rejected as failing to meet minimal standards of acceptability or, if I'm feeling especially generous, handed back to you for revision and resubmission. This means that you ought to proofread carefully anything you will be submitting. I very much care about the quality of your writing – and so should you! One final caution: *Late*

papers will not be accepted. Thus, if for some reason you must miss a class, it's a good idea to check and see if there has been an assignment.

5. *Discussion sections* You are enrolled in one of the six discussion sessions. (If not, we have a *serious* problem!) These meetings are as integral to the course as the lectures; do not suppose that they are opportunities to catch up on your beauty sleep. You are expected to attend regularly, bringing your questions and interpretations to class. How regularly you attend and contribute will determine up to 10% of your course grade. Your TA will provide further instructions.

IV. Readings

I'm not able to predict our precise pace for the next 15 weeks. So consider this schedule tentative. If there are any significant changes, they will be announced in advance. Otherwise, please gauge your reading so as to be at least one unit ahead of where we left off last time. You are, of course, free to read sections omitted from the syllabus.

WEEK 1

Jan 12 Introduction
Jan. 14 Genesis 18 - 22

WEEK 2

Jan. 19 No class; MLK Day,
Jan. 21 Antigone

WEEK 3

Jan. 26 Antigone
Jan 28 “

WEEK 4

Feb. 2 Smith, *TMS*, Section I, pp. 9-26
Feb. 4 *TMS*, Part II, Section II, pp. 78-91; Part III, Chap VI, pp. 171-178

WEEK 5

Feb. 9 *TMS*, Part III, Chaps 1-2+ pp. 109-141
Feb. 11 *TMS*, Part IV, Chap I, pp. 179-187; Part VI, Sect II, Chap II, pp. 227-234;

WEEK 6

Feb. 16 Part VII, Sect II, Chap IV, pp. 306-317
Feb. 18 Smith Wrap-up and review

WEEK 7

Feb. 23 Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chs 1,2
 Feb. 25 *Utilitarianism*, Ch 3

WEEK 8

March 2 *Utilitarianism*, Ch 4
 March 4 *Utilitarianism*, Ch 5

WEEK 9

March 7-15 **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS THIS WEEK!**
 Use this week to read as much of *Crime and Punishment* as you can

WEEK 10

March 16 *Crime and Punishment* roughly first half
 March 18 “

WEEK 10

March 23 *Crime and Punishment*, roughly second half
 March 25 “

WEEK 11

March 30 Kant, *Groundwork*, Pt. 1
 April 1 Kant, *Groundwork*, Pt. 2 “

WEEK 12

April 6 Hume, *Treatise* (extracts)
 April 8 Hume, continued

WEEK 13

April 13 Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus* (extracts)
 April 15 Camus, continued

WEEK 14

April 20 Plato, *Symposium*, roughly first third
 April 22 Plato, *Symposium*, roughly middle third

WEEK 15

April 27 Plato, *Symposium*, roughly final third
 April 29 WE'RE ALL DONE!

FINAL EXAM: APRIL 30, 2 P.M.